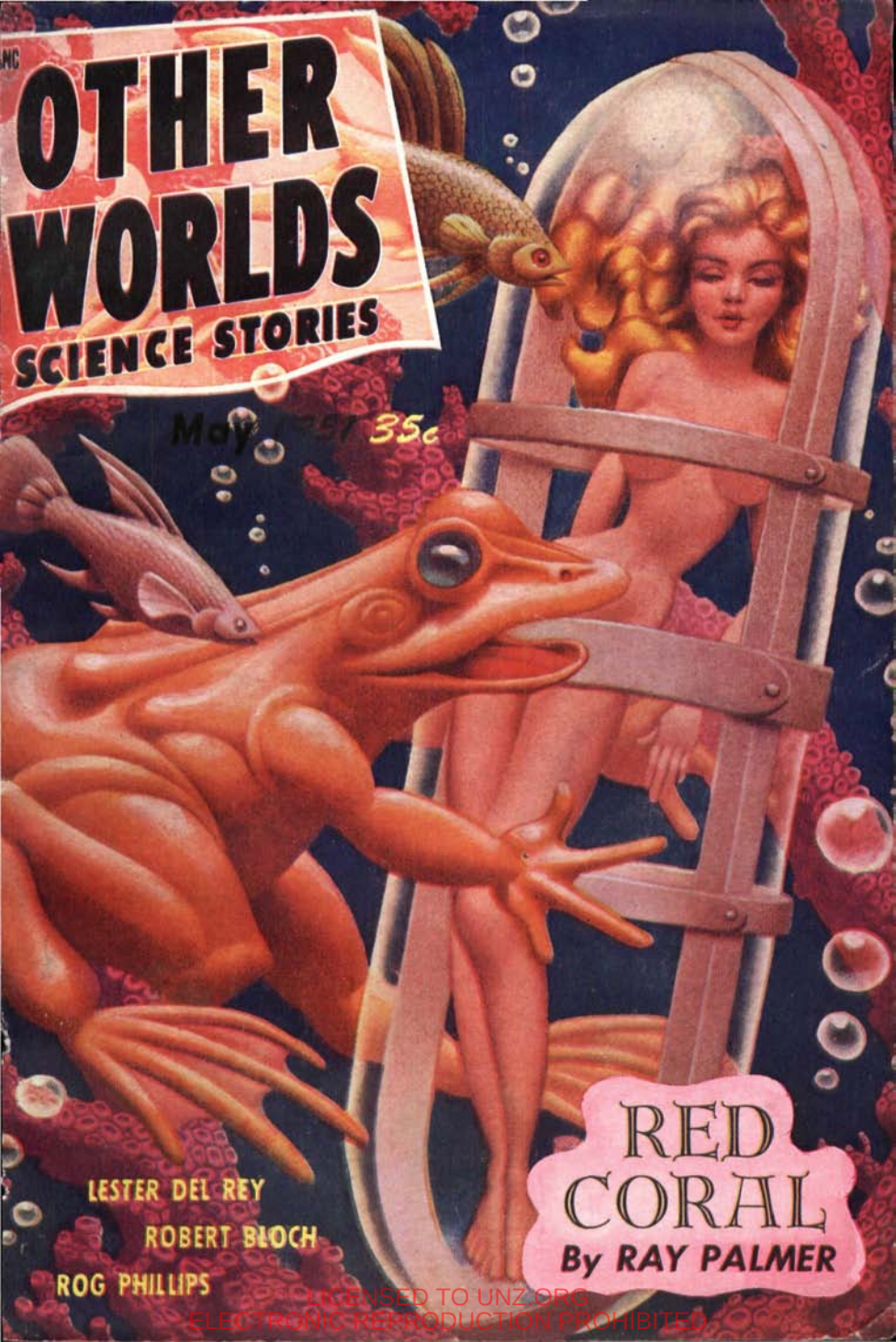

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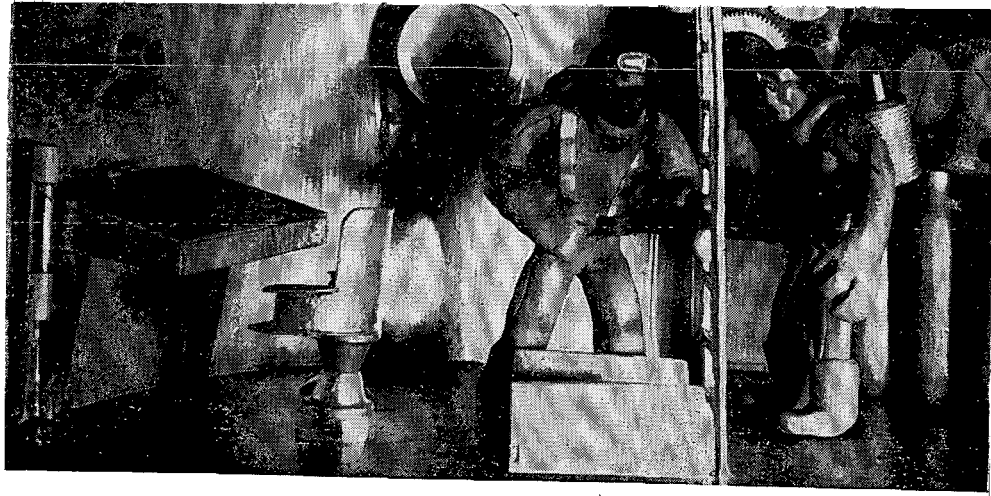
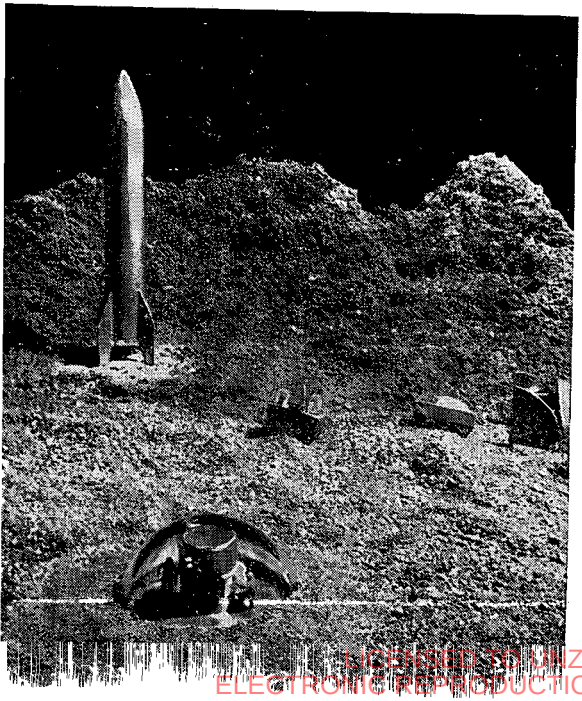


A VOYAGE TO THE MOON

George W. Earley, Bethesda, Maryland science fiction fan, is also an amateur photography fan. Here he has combined his interests to produce a fascinating pictorial voyage to the moon, using models he built himself.



Earley's unusual skill at buildin models for his camera to photograp is evident in this series of picture intended to dramatize a trip to th moon via spaceship. In the pictur above, the interior of the ship i shown enroute to the moon. Here w see the space travelers using thei magnetic shoes in their first attempt to move about in the spaceship with out the aid of a gravitational fiel Meters indicating oxygen balanc speed, directional factors, and so forth need constant watching in this pre carious operation of breaking dow the 240,000 mile barrier between ou worlds.

The rocket has landed on the moon and the space travelers have set u plastic, air-filled shelter.

Continued on inside back cov

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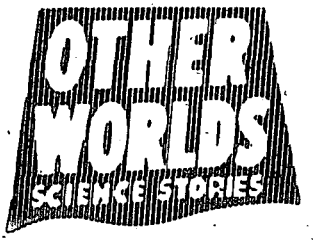

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EDITORIAL

We've got something rather unusual to talk about, editorially, this month. And because later on in this "revelation from the editor" we are going to talk about Richard S. Shaver, we're going to link the two subjects.

Most of us will remember the first of the Shaver stories, which caused such astonishment and created such a storm of controversy. In that first story one point was brought out by Shaver as a "characteristic" of the underground civilization of the dero. Said Shaver, government control was a matter of slavery to an instrument known as the telaug, which put thoughts into people's heads which they deemed to be their own, but which actually were the product of "government policy". In short, rule of a people was a mental thing, and free will and freedom were only an illusion. This was, as Mr. Shaver put it "a safe government—safe from revolution".

Recently we've been hearing a great deal about something new to free people, and by free people we mean Americans, called "thought-control". We'll admit that it has been rather loosely used, and that it is not an actuality, as the term might have been implied by certain newscasters. But, the important thing is the fact that it has been used!

More than twenty years ago, in *Amazing Stories* and other science fiction magazines, old-time science fiction readers will remember many stories in which a sort of political science was stressed. H. G. Wells did it, Captain S. P. Meek did it, and dozens of other top writers used the subject. In many of them ther was a horrendous picture drawn o a future civilization in which some thing like thought-control was a real ity. In these stories, imaginary civ ilizations were shown where menta intimidation ranged from actua control through "listening or spying devices" to an enormously expande and completely devastating (to initi ative in thinking) propaganda whicl stifled all truth and all persona freedom.

Actually, thought-control up t now has been a matter of propagan da, almost exclusively. Some of th propaganda is deliberate, but most o it is a sort of happenstance due t "just plain gossip". We are not con cerned with that, as we believe n American can be controlled in hi thinking. But he can be controlle in his *expression* of those thoughts That is where our point comes in

As editors of OTHER WORLDS, we want to stress one thing with great emphasis—the stories in this maga zine are the FREE expression o imagination combined with carefu thought, dealing with other worlds than our own, including future worlds. Thus, since it has been im plied that we are headed toward a sort of censorship which forbids the expression of ideas because they are "different and therefore can be called "left" or "red" or "un-American" or "communistic" by those ignorant ones who do not read science fiction, we want to assure our authors that even in the field of political science they can express their thoughts freely.

In short, fear that what we say

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ıay be interpreted wrongly by any ıdividual or agency, should not pre-ent us from the free development of cience fiction as it should be.

As an example, let's take the novel, 984. Today, we think, it is a form f propaganda. It was written to demonstrate" what would happen n a communistic world. If it had een published in *Amazing Stories* wenty years ago, we could not have aid it was propaganda, merely good cience fiction. We positively de-end the right of that book to be vritten and published. We also de-end the right of a book which im-ıgines a *different* result of a politi-al theory. Today, if such a book were published, it would be called ed. And if "thought-control" has ts way, the writer would be *punish-d*, perhaps executed! At the least, ıe would lose, not only his original reedom of expression, but his per-ıonal liberty. And because of propa-ganda, he would be ostracized by his fellow men even if he remained at liberty. And such would mean fi-nancial ruin.

That is the one thing we Americans must avoid. We must preserve our liberties at all costs, and the future of science fiction depends on those liberties of expression. There is, to-day, in this country, a growing fear of expressing new ideas because they may go counter to the political trend of the day. Let's not allow such thinking and such fear to enter sci-ence fiction. Let's produce new ideas in our imaginary worlds in prolific numbers and on *all* subjects. And let the chips fall where they may.

Due to the recent query we made concerning the writings of Richard S. Shaver, you readers came forward with some answers we'll give here. First, nobody, it seems, has any ob-jection to Mr. Shaver, and indeed, most people consider him to be a very good writer. Second, it seems to be virtually unanimous that we bring him to you under his own name. There is a qualification, however, and that is that he write new stories, and allow his famous mystery to re-main where it is—in the caves. Every-body asked us to publish a list of Mr. Shaver's pen names, and we will comply with that request in the next issue. The reason we do not give it to you this month is because the list is quite extensive, and we want to give it to you complete. We have one comment—you readers who said he was a good writer knew your stuff, because many of his stories under other names have been top favorites in our pages, and also in the pages of *Amazing Stories and Fantastic Ad-ventures*, and even in such magazines as *Mammoth Adventure*.

And as an aside from your editor, thanks for demonstrating that OW readers (and that goes for *Amazing Stories* readers who wrote us) are just about the fairest and most openminded readers in the pulp field. The only reason for banning the Mystery, it seems, was to make sure all of us would be pleased—and the fact that some considerable num-ber of readers dislike stories of that type was the basis of decision. A wise choice, and we'll try to live up to it by giving you Shaver's very best efforts.

We present this issue the first of a series of illustrations by Edd Car-tier. This, of course, is by special instruction from you readers. We hope you like his first one for us, and we can promise many more.

Incidentally, "Heroes Are Made" is the story Cartier illustrated, and we think it's funnier than a discard-ed crutch. If you think it isn't fun to discard a crutch, try it sometime! Enjoy this issue and grow fat—be-cause laughing does that. *Rap*

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"IF YE HAVE FAITH . . ."

Lester del Rey

This is the story no other editor would buy because God was a character. We present it to you with all due respect. If it makes you feel small—well . . .

IT was a series of improbable chances that led to the observation of the Ship and the Being. Certainly the middle of the Gobi desert was the one spot where anything could happen and have no effect on the lives of the people on

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Illustration by Bill Terry

the planet. Only pure, blind luck could account for it happening as it did. Of course, some would claim it was all a Divine Plan—but when even Divinity can have accidents, it seems more probable that Bailey and Warren were simply not spotted in time.

At any event, there they were, out in the middle of the worst of the Gobi. They were out of water, and had been since they met by sheer accident three days before in their trek toward the goal each was

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pursuing. Warren had been a missionary, until wars and the legend of jewels among the Tatars had sent him scuttling across the backlands in a more honest chase than his soul - saving had ever been. He'd found the jewels too—though anyone but a fool would have known there were none. And now he was out here avoiding the lances of certain tribesmen who were seeking vengeance, with the fat peeling off his jowls and sheer habit driving him on, his bald head dry and flaking already.

Bailey was some sort of an engineer, as well as something of the movie adventurer type in looks—before the hollows grew in his cheeks and his eyes became red sockets of aching search for water. Warren had met him behind a rock when the tribesmen got close, to learn that Bailey had gotten mixed up in some local fracas and was being chased by another group. They watched the two tribes squabble until night, and then the two had set out together, without water, to cross some unknown distance of desert. They had to.

Now Warren was dying, and he knew it. There was no faith in him to bolster him up, either. Death was ugly, death was fearsome. In his saner moments he envied the militant atheism that had propped up Bailey's spirits and the calm faith of some of his former fellow-missionaries. He had neither the one nor the other.

Ahead of him, Bailey had pulled himself slowly up a slope of grit and sand, his lips working, making new cracks in the skin. Warren watched moving his own limbs in time with the other. He was busy with thoughts that meant salvation, he knew—if he could find the key. It was a warm thought, like fire. Like the fiery chariot in which Elijah had been carried to heaven. Was it Elijah?

It wasn't right, to have the sky screaming at him. That was nonsense. He knew the sky couldn't scream. An eddy of sanity drifted back, just as the sky seemed to shudder again, melting and running together into a great brass bowl that clapped with thunder, and then became one point of sudden flame, brighter than the sun that was directly above. It was like a meteor, plunging down, leaving a long streak behind it. Bailey was watching it, too. Bailey couldn't be seeing the same dream—they must be sane again.

The glowing thing came sweeping down in an arc now, curving to slow and settle slowly. It was spherical now, a strange golden glow around something that might have been metallic poetry of huge form and flowing line. It came to a stop, with a vague hint inside of the sheer impossibility of such a metallic globe that was somehow a great flat plane and a pointed cylinder at the same time. But the glow wasn't steady now. It was a mere uncertain golden haze, with red splotches in the gold, somehow sick in appearance.

"Space ship," Bailey muttered

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through his tortured lips.

The renegade missionary shook his head. "Golden chair—chariot. Come to carry us to heaven. I'm not ready to die yet . . . God!"

Something had opened in the strangely unseeable outlines of the vessel, and a Being was emerging. There was an effulgence about the Being, and a physical wave of fear and sheer, driving, compelling awe hit the two men before they could focus their eyes. There was a high-pitched singing sound in the air, and a dim, rosy glow touched the earth and rounded up into the sky around the Being, in a radius that barely touched Bailey and Warren.

Then they were thrust backward, lifted from the ground and drifting away from the Being. They could still see the Being moving along the Ship, carrying a Thing and making some motion toward the red splotches that wavered sickly. Something like a tremendously calm irritation, urgency and sense of creation or re-creation registered on Warren's mind, even as they reached the edge of the Being's rosy mantle and slid down it to earth, to stumble back hastily.

BAILEY was pop-eyed, and there was sweat on his skin. Sweat? Then Warren was conscious that all the thirst was gone, that his clothing was new and whole, and that he was in better physical condition than he'd been for the past year, alive and tingling with good health and the sense of having his appetites just nicely sated. Bailey was again the smooth-faced movie hero in appearance, the cracks gone from his lips, his eyes clear.

"Space ship," the engineer muttered. "Wrecked space ship. It needs fixing." He turned and tried to force his way into the rosy hemisphere, but it threw him back.

"God!" Warren's voice was rolling in the deep tones he'd used in converting the heathen, but there was knowledge in it now. "God! And Moses saw God in a burning bush."

For a second, the old flame rose in Bailey's eyes, and then he nodded calmly. "God, of course! When a man sees God, he knows Him. Yeah, I see what you mean. If you see God, you know Him — and anyone you meet will know you've really seen Him. That the test?"

"Moses saw God and was able to convert all the Israelites who were a stiff-necked people, as the Bible puts it," Warren agreed. He no longer would wonder at anything, even the semi-telepathy by which Bailey could grasp his thoughts. A false god might convince a man, but only God could convince those who saw the man who had seen God. *I have seen the Glory of the Coming of the Lord* —that must be the Glory, the mantle of something convincing that would surround the two of them the rest of their lives. Warren was certain of that.

The rosy hemisphere reached out a bit, and the unbearable awe and power thrust them back again, out of any chance of looking at the Ship and the Being.

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Bailey snapped his fingers at a stone thoughtfully, and watched a spring of water bubble from the top of it. Another snap produced milk, and a third gave a rich, grapey wine. The former atheist nodded. "We have been called, Warren. But how can we return to spread the Word?"

Warren had no idea. He stood with his finger barely in contact with the glow, letting things beyond human concept flow through him, while a small part of his mind dealt with the problem.

"I wish we were both back in Los Angeles," he agreed. "But . . . "

The street lights were bright in their eyes a second later, and there was a small group of staring watchers, with a blue-coated policeman heading toward them.

Warren felt no surprise at the teleportation. With a feeling of warm compassionate love, he looked at those about him, unblessed by the fortune that had touched Bailey and himself. Slowly he raised his hand.

"Peace, brothers," he intoned.

The policeman dropped to one knee, bowed his head, and prayed in a sudden ecstasy that was instantly echoed by all the others about.

Warren tossed the jewels in his pouch toward them and began spreading the Word, while Bailey moved on to collect another crowd. "Peace, brothers," he began. And there was peace.

II

THE jungle stank more than usual that day. Doc Smidt pushed his way along the almost hidden path with the sweat popping off his forehead and making the clothes stick to his scrawny figure. He looked up at a chattering monkey above him and shook his head. He'd been a fool, maybe, to come down here and spend a year working in the wildest of the Amazon country. But it was worth it. In a few more years, these strange monkeys might have been killed off by some plague, and the experiment could never have been performed.

At most, there couldn't be over five hundred of them left, in two or three little tribes. He'd heard legends for years, but he'd never believed in them until some crazy explorer had managed to ship one of the little ring-tailed, furry creatures back.

But it had been the perfect case. They were so close to having intelligence that Goldman's cortical serum could actually push them over the borderline, into a level where crude speech was possible.

Smidt swung on, paying no attention to the sweat and the clinging, sticky jungle. In another six months, his preliminary work would be finished, and he could return to Rio for a few months, letting the automatic tapes take down the results. But until then, only the most rigid of controls would insure success.

He found one of the recording machines in the bole of the tree used as headquarters by the C group of Pequichi monkeys, and nodded with pleasure. Excellent. There must have been an unusual clambake

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among them this last week, judging from the length of the tape that had been used; the machine only operated during periods of monkey jabber.

That completed his collecting, and he turned back toward his camp, gloating a bit. The beauty of the whole experiment lay in the fact that the three clans of the Pequichi monkeys were completely unwilling to have anything to do with each other. That had simplified his problem tremendously, since he could leave the A tribe alone, inject serum into the captured B's without teaching them anything, and free them later, and use the C's for the all-out experiment.

The C's the bushmen caught for him were injected and held for a few months after treatment while he carefully taught them a rudimentary language. The B's were released at once after treatment, with their intelligence raised, but no education, so that the possibility of speech arising as a direct result of intelligence could be tested. Originally, he'd meant to leave the A's alone, but the headman had messed things up by bringing in a few of them with some B's. Only by good luck had he discovered it in time, and now the A's that had been treated were held in a cage where they were learning human speech from the bushmen, but at least unable to contaminate the A's with any added intelligence factor.

Smidt chuckled, jumping over a snake on the trail with an agility that belied his fifty years. Wait till Messinger saw the results he'd get from this. Messinger and his cockeyed theories about the formation of primitive languages. When this was finished, the Smidt theory of mnemonic tongue gesturing would be accepted as it should have been years ago—the preliminary results were not conclusive yet, but they pointed the way clearly enough that he could see they would be. And with the three groups, there could be no questioning those results.

He came near the compound of his camp, grinning as he saw some of the supposedly savage bushmen come running out. They always got excited when he went out alone, thinking apparently that he couldn't care for himself alone in the jungle! Hell, hadn't he spent thirty years of his life in every primitive backwash and jungle of the world, trying to prove his points by field work among primitives? Now, with the Pequichi monkeys so impossibly near intelligence and with Goldman's cortical serum recently discovered for treatment of imbeciles, there'd be no more of that. A few more years, and he'd retire to one of the university jobs they'd be begging him to take.

The headman came up, finally, grinning and bobbing about. He should have been back shrinking a newly captured head, but he'd taken a liking to Smidt, and assumed personal responsibility. Smidt's trick of mastering the native language in some three weeks had made the

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whole tribe feel the gods were with him, though it wasn't much of a stunt for a man who was both a natural and trained linguist.

"You shouldn't go out alone," the chief began, as usual. "The moon of thin mating is up, and almost full. The big god of the little people might eat you. He comes now."

Smidt nodded easily, grinning. He was used to the native fear of the mysterious "big god" of the Pequichi monkeys — something like a fifty-foot monkey, he gathered. The symptoms of the god's eating were singularly like those of a common tropical disease, but the chief wouldn't care about that.

"The big god didn't eat me, you see," he quipped.

The chief nodded wisely. "No. When you were gone at the time of the big god, we took council. We have saved you. The big god loves the little people, and he will favor those who are good to them. Perhaps he already likes you for the help you give the little folk. But we made sure."

Smidt tossed his tapes onto the table and gravely diluted a drink down to almost nothing for the chief, while he made a stout one for himself. "It was kind of you."

The chief gestured grandly. "It was very wise. We took council long, and we worried much. But wisdom was in us. We know, of course, that you have held the little folk only to await a good sign, but the big god might not have understood. So we opened the doors of the pens, and the little folk went away happy."

Smidt put his drink down slowly, sinking into a chair and looking up dully.

"You released all the Pequichi— the ones I call A's, also?"

The chief nodded proudly. "All. Now the big god will love you. Did he not let you come back well?"

"Not too well," Smidt answered. The muscles in his cheeks tautened, and the tendons along his arms were bunched, but years of experience with primitives lay behind him, and he did not even think to blame the chief for what was meant to be helpful.

No controls! None without any language, to prove that even the most unintelligible could learn a language developed by others with proper mnemonic relation to labial gesturings, but not from any other type of speech! No more experiment!

Doc Smidt would never have that soft job in the universities now. Doc Smidt would spend the rest of his life in steamy jungles, trying to get results out of the corrupted and civilization-influenced tongues of men.

He stood up slowly, dropping his hand gravely onto the chief's shoulder, accepting the failure of his lifework as he had accepted Messinger's success.

"Get the white bird that flies with a man in its belly," he told the chief. "The call of my people has come to me, and I must return to my home."

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He finished the drink, picked up the few salvageable bits of notes and tapes from his work, and went out to watch the natives drag the plane out onto the crude runway they had constructed. Damn all gods!

III

FOUR DAYS had passed since Warren had last seen Bailey go off to spread the Word, and they had been busy days. Warren could feel the glow about him, a warm satisfaction in righteousness, as he had seen his theory confirmed and had seen the conversion of the wicked beyond number.

Now he stopped, noting with satisfaction the prayer meeting being held on the corner. But one of the unregenerates, who had somehow managed to avoid all appeals to appear where Warren and Bailey spoke, was kibitzing. Warren started toward the unfortunate, preparing to convert him, when he noticed Bailey move forward and touch the man. The lost soul was suddenly found, and the man dropped on his knees with the crowd.

"Peace in God," Bailey called, joining Warren. "I have heard of your good work in moving to take over the Temple. The millenium is at hand!"

Warren beamed in love of his fellow apostle. With the queer emotional telepathy between them, he had no need to comment on all the good that Bailey had accomplished. Getting the mayor converted and convinced to use the police and radio facilities of the city to make all citizens go to the Temple for the ten-minute conversion shifts had been a stroke of genius on Bailey's part.

"I've also been discussing it with the pastors who have formed our guidance unit," he said happily. "We have decided that the Lord will withhold His Face from most of us until evil has been rooted out, but that He will come when we are ready. And evil cannot stand against righteousness."

Bailey nodded sweetly, and turned to one of the members of the prayer meeting who had come up diffidently. The man bowed and hesitated.

"We — we're hungry, Teacher. Since we have seen the Light, we cannot panhandle, you know. And we'd have to quit praying to work for money. Help us."

Bailey lifted an eyebrow, and Warren accepted the right to perform the miracle. From somewhere, some scraps of food were dug up, along with some grape-juice in the bottom of a bottle. Warren spread his hands over the tiny scraps, and left the pile of food for the men to sort through. He had discovered that eating was no longer necessary to him.

Bailey fell into step. They went down the impoverished street and crossed over onto better sections, neither proud of the reverence that met them everywhere, nor overly humble. It was obviously a homage paid to them as the precursors of the Day, and hence not to be con-

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sidered on a personal level. Once or twice, they caught sight of someone who had been missed in the conversions, but a gesture from the hand of one or the other remedied the situation.

"The President is supposed to be sending in troops to investigate and establish the old order of evil," Bailey commented. "The word came over the wires when the Mayor decided to leave his position. They cannot understand that Good needs no governing. How are the planes coming along?"

Warren smiled, pausing to touch an old woman who was hobbling along the street, without waiting to see her suddenly straighten and move with the free stride of youth. He was accustomed to miracles by then.

"I'm heading for the docks now," he commented. The idea of sending the big overseas planes on into the depths of the Gobi with eager recruits for apostleship had been one of which he was quite proud. Naturally, the airline companies had been fully cooperative, once their directors had seen the follies of evil pursuit of profit in a day of the Coming. Bailey had obviously heard of it.

A SHOPKEEPER had opened a delicatessen hopefully, but no one was buying at the outrageous prices he had listed, in hopes of a killing while all other shops were closed. Naturally, the converted knew the error of money. "Sell that which thou hast and give unto the poor," could only mean—together with other things—that the possession of money was a sinful evidence of evil. Now the manager at the store stood screaming futilely at the people who passed by with only compassionate glances at his unregeneracy.

Bailey gestured and the shopkeeper's face lighted up with a sudden love and understanding. He went into his store and came out with choice items handing them to all who passed by, his smile of pleasure at their acceptance a beautiful thing to see. Most of the passerbys took the goods to keep him happy, dumping them into the nearest garbage basket. From the amount in the baskets, it was obvious that the sanitary department was holding prayer meetings, too.

The two apostles went on, watching the pleasant city, so empty of the usual competition and hustle. They were half-way there when it occurred to Bailey that an auto was a better solution. The owner of the car prostrated himself with delight at giving it to them, and progress was more rapid, though some of the people gathered in the middle of the streets in solemn meeting made driving difficult.

One of the big planes came in, just as they arrived. Warren watched the new apostles coming off, their faces beaming, and he knew they had seen God. There is no question when a man has seen God. Everyone knows it at once. For a second, a

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passing twinge of resentment hit at him for the loss of the uniqueness of his and Bailey's position; now there would be thousands of apostles. But the flash vanished, and he rubbed his bald spot tenderly. So far, he had not been able to make hair grow on his head, though he had cured baldness in others.

"Peace to you," the pilot said, passing a hand over Warren's head. The hair that sprang up seemed to throw the former missionary's finger away from his scalp. He hadn't thought of the pilot becoming an apostle, too, though it was natural enough. He'd have to inspect the number of available pilots—unless the man could realize the importance of his mission in guiding new advocates for such a position.

Warren asked a few questions, but nothing had changed. The Being was still doing something outside the Ship, the rosy glow was still around the Being, and the awe, and other emotions, were still affecting all who approached. The only change was that the nimbus had spread out further, and that planes as well as people could not penetrate, but were carried aside by it.

Bailey came back and approached the pilot, who nodded, and went back to the plane.

"The Government troops are coming tomorrow," Bailey said. "I thought one of us might fly to Washington and remove the evil that has hardened the heart of our President and representatives, while one of the others goes to meet and spread the Word to the troops. With a few more apostles and cooperation from the Government, His Will shall prevail throughout the land."

Warren considered it, nodded, and headed toward the plane. It was a wonderful world. He waited two hours while someone was found who could supply the plane for the flight, and then they were off. He and the pilot had a lovely talk on the Glories of God and the millenium that would begin when evil had been cleansed from all men.

When he returned the next day, the troops were engaged in prayer, the President had gone to Asia to become an apostle, and the only difficulty lay in the severe shortage of apostles to spread through the country. The diplomatic corps was informing the whole world of the Coming of God, and plans were already being started by the former War Department to mount a television pick-up and pipe out a signal by which everyone should be able to watch God in His Glory.

But he could not delay too long for details. He was scheduled to meet with other apostles to decide whether it was more righteous to convert men faster than miracles could feed them or to relax in spreading the Word. They finally compromised by deciding to go ahead with conversion, but to consider some work as the equivalent of prayer in righteousness, so that part of the feeding could be done as before.

It became less urgent when it was

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found that a few of the men converted to the Word by apostles were also able to perform such routine miracles as increasing the amount of food.

IV

HIRAM JUDSON, Ph.D., stepped into his private laboratory and mentioned the name of the Creator, but not with piety. He added a few choice details pertaining to the progenitors of certain workers and a bit more on their personal habits.

Then, because he was forty years of age, and neither too old to do triple work under strain nor too young to hold onto his basic determination, he moved into the building, shut the door, and began whistling. He glanced at the order-rack, and shook his head. No mail had come in, and that on top of the dwindling requirements for work for the past week, might be serious in time.

Still, in a way it was welcome. As a consulting metallurgist with a reputation and enough private income to set up a full laboratory well outside any of the cities, he could coast without orders for another year. And it would give him time for his pet project. Engineers shouldn't be graduate physicists, chemists, and biologists in addition to their straight business, but he couldn't help it if he'd been born a genius and a man who liked to make money at the same time.

This time the bug lay in a trick alloy that refused to fit any rule. It was lovely stuff when tempered and age-hardened, but it wouldn't take heat-treatment in any standard way. There were "islands" in the middle of hardened sections that simply refused to have any reaction from the treatment.

Not only that, but they grew with time, sending out little crystals that looked exactly like tiny corkscrews, until the whole mass of the alloy was like that. To make life completely stable, of course, the untreated sections behaved somewhat like a hunk of rubber. It stretched and snapped back, took a blow from a hammer by indenting and rebounding, and generally refused to recognize that it was a metal. In that state, the stuff wouldn't melt—though the electric furnace could and would melt pure tungsten.

Apparently, he had a wholly new state of matter, with such odd habits as superconductivity to electricity, and a much higher heat transfer in one direction than the other. It had everything! And yet, in some hundred-odd other productions of the alloy, all had gone smoothly. Only this one batch misbehaved.

Judson picked up the fifty pound slab fondly, observing that it was all rubbery by now. He clicked on the pump of the electron microscope, sliced off a few molecules of thickness from the alloy on a superspeed, super-fine saw of his own invention, and began getting the microscope ready. For comparison, he had a section of the alloy that had gone through as expected and proved heat-treatable. Its moh test had

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stabilized properly and no changes had occurred.

If he could crack this puzzle by himself, he'd learn more about the behavior of matter in weeks than all science had discovered in centuries.

He went about it with enthusiasm, forgetting the absent workers, the lack of orders, and the fact that no newspaper or trade journal had been delivered for a week. Once he cut on the radio, to hear a canned program of hymn tunes on one station only, but he didn't bother to worry about it. Having found the generally rhythmical noise of any music a help to thinking, it didn't matter whether it was a hymn or a fugue. He was bellowing "Nearer, My God, to Thee," happily in a basso profundo when the door opened and Eckstein came edging in.

Eckstein was a hard worker, with a sensitivity to the behavior of metals that had made him number one on the list of those due for a raise, and Judson started to grin.

Eckstein cut it off. "Praise God, Mr. Judson. You've seen the Light. Shall we pray?"

"For Christ's sake!"

"Or God's. Do names matter in this day of the Divine Weighing? I have heard the Call from those who have seen with their eyes. But I was forced to return, since I had taken some of your tools for my own work at home, and it would be a sin not to return them. Here. Now shall we pray?"

Judson expressed himself rather well, considering the short period of preparation. Shock was followed by pity and compassion on the face of Eckstein.

Then the little man regarded the work on the alloy, and nodded slowly. "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. But I see you have been sorely tempted, and that the Word has not found you. Oh, come with me and be saved. All knowledge lies within Him, and He is come to reveal it to us. What is the problem that weighs on your soul?"

Judson considered the handle of a shovel thoughtfully, and looked at Eckstein. The man was obviously off his rocker, and not drunk. He watched as Eckstein moved to the seldom-used television set and turned it on. It warmed up, and a colored picture appeared on the screen that should have carried only black and white. Judson blinked, but Eckstein shrugged.

"It is nothing. A full thousand apostles found that nothing could be perceived without color, so they worked in a group to make a miracle whereby color would replace the greys. Or so I have been told. Behold—He is here!"

JUDSON SAW the Being in a rosy cloud, since the pickup was at considerable distance, obviously, from the subject of its view. The Ship caught his attention. He studied it, decided it was a nice camera effect, and dismissed it. There was no feeling of awe or power over the screen, though it was obvious that Eckstein reacted rather violently to

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it.

Judson snapped it off. "Get the hell out, Eckstein," he said, hoping a normal order might work. He'd heard of the apostles, of course, but hadn't thought they'd make much progress. It didn't matter. "I've got to find out what keeps this alloy from behaving normally."

"Then you won't join me in Saving Grace?"

"Right now I wouldn't join you in ruining Grace. Scram, I got work to do."

Eckstein pondered it, and lifted his hands, concentrating. A strange bubble went up Judson's spine, and a socket wrench leaped up from the table and turned inside out, but nothing else happened. The metal in the alloy "poinnnged" once, but it remained in its rubbery attempt to spring back against a torsion meter.

Eckstein considered.

"It will take an apostle, perhaps two," he decided. "But they will know. I have some Grace, but not enough. I could not pass the test to be guided to view Him in person. Still, since there must be an end to evil before He will begin His Reign, perhaps the apostles will deem this of sufficient importance to remove the blight from your alloy."

"Listen!" Judson picked up the shovel handle and moved forward. "You or your apostles lay a finger on that alloy and I'll perform a miracle myself—and be damned if they hang me. Now—*git!*"

Eckstein wiggled his hands, and disappeared. Judson could see a vague blur move toward the door, and the door opened and closed. Then all was normal.

Judson stood there, sweating quietly. Finally he went back to his experiment. He had to find out what happened in that hunk of alloy, and all the crackpots in the world weren't going to stop him. Religion was fine, but no Divine Revelation had ever yet given a decent picture of the atom; it was a dirty trick of a Divinity to take such a device as an atom in such large quantities and leave no key to that, while covering all angles on a soul nobody could do any research on. He'd stick to empiricism.

V

BAILEY CAME through the door to the pilot's cabin slowly, not bothering to close it. For a second, he stared at the fuel gauge, and then over toward Warren, who was rubbing his hands through the bushy hair on his head. But the fuel was still lasting, and no further miracle seemed needed. Bailey had noticed that miracles sometimes seemed to provide less than full benefits, though that was probably due to some wavering of faith.

He couldn't be sure. As an atheist before the Revelation, he had escaped most of the dogma and cant of religion, and while he could now accept the True Word, some of the trappings about it still bothered him at times. He cursed his lack of faith and sat down where he could observe the terrain below.

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Warren muttered unhappily. "I come not upon earth to send peace, but a sword," he quoted. Bailey followed his glance downward to see a huge mob of tiny horsemen moving against a larger mob of men on foot and a few small tanks. There were puffs of gunpowder here and there, showing that supplies had somehow been brought up, in spite of the lack of transportation facilities.

Bailey made no comment. It was only a momentary weakness on Warren's part; the ex-missionary didn't really feel that a Holy War over the True Name of God was profitable or a sign of Grace. None of those who had been blessed by direct Sight could so misuse the Word. But many of the converts were less clear in understanding.

He considered it, wondering why miracles could not touch the human mind; direct Sight or the sight of one who had seen the Being could end doubts, but no miracle could bring tolerance to those who were fighting.

But it was strange that the Holy Wars had seemed to start in the very section of the Gobi near which the Coming lay, and that they had spread from there so rapidly. At times it almost seemed that the Divinity wanted to bring a sword. . . .

He shuffled the thought aside, realizing that the fervor of the Truth was strongest to those who could most closely approach, and that such a fervor might make a quarrel over the Name of God a bitter thing. It was only that his mind was tired from the long-continued miracle that could bring such thoughts. And it had taken all available apostles to work together on that miracle and teleport all the leaders of the Wars here, where they could be flown to the Presence of the Power of God. If they could learn to believe fully . . .

He dozed off deliberately, shutting his mind off from the worries that had beset it; sleep was not necessary, but he could induce it. Since the President had been converted, Warren and he had been the actual leaders in Faith over the Christian world, and the responsibility had pressed heavily on them. Soon it would be over, though.

He dreamed vaguely of a time when all would be saved, and only goodness and righteousness would exist; then, with no evil, God would come forth to take over the world, and the Reign of Heaven should begin.

A severe jolting brought him out of the daze later, and he saw that they were fighting through a storm. Then the rosy glow under it penetrated, and he turned to Warren. But the queer half-telepathy joined with memories of recent accounts. Since the Wars had begun, The Creator had hidden His Presence under a growing cloud of storm and gloom, and it had been increasingly difficult to penetrate to Him; there were now great difficulties in getting more apostles. Surely no further proof of God's displeasure in the Wars was needed.

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THE plane buffeted its way down, finding a landing well beyond the glowing aura. Warren ran his head of hair through his hands in what might have been a kneeling to prayer, and Bailey motioned him back to where the other apostles were untying the leaders of the sides of the Holy Wars; some of the effects of the miracle were still on them, since the men followed along meekly enough as Bailey and Warren set out into the curiously jagged terrain and the gathering storm.

They passed a television hookup, still working through the gloom on some frequency—and still impossibly translating the results into full color on the screen. Then the ground seemed to grow rough beyond anything he could remember, and the wind began to hit at them, tossing them from side to side. The leaders of the warring factions were thrown to the rough terrain, but got up again obediently and moved on.

Finally, they approached the glow, and some of the gloom let up. Bailey dragged himself forward, until he stood near the edge, and could look in, to see the Being still moving about, doing something to the Ship. The red splotches in the golden glow around the Ship were fewer now. And the Thing the Being held was different.

But Bailey's eyes dropped now, and his body tensed and wrenched within itself. Something too strong to be other than tangible was wrenching at him — driving his muscles into knotted masses, hitting at his nerves, worming about within his mind. The first time, he had been too near death from thirst and fatigue to react fully. But now the awe that ran through him left him a wooden image, his whole psychic pattern wrenched out of norm.

Somehow, he dropped his eyes, but the feeling remained, less strong, but driving at him. And with it came a terrible sense of urgncy, of something like despair, and a tumult of emotions he could not even name. He swung about, to see Warren turning slowly to face the leaders.

It had hit them, too, though they were further back and had not received the full impact. But Bailey could see a glow about them, as if they were lighted from within. Step by step, they were falling back, and he retreated with them, until he could feel some of the dreadful and ecstatic soul-impact relax.

Warren's hair had changed, and was now a brown, waving crop of softness, something that it must have been originally, when the man was young. And a bit of the fat was gone. All of the others had changed subtly—and Bailey could feel changes in himself, though less than the others seemed to show.

But it was Warren who caught himself first. "Thou shalt not kill," he intoned. "The Lord is a God of Love, as you have seen. Worship your God in the ways of the Righteous, or ever the evil days come when ye shall say, I have no pleasure in them. God is great and inscrutable, and His Name is known only

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to Angels. For whosoever shall worship Him, in goodness and in honesty, he shall be saved. But whosoever cries out 'God, God,' but loves not righteousness, he shall be damned. For the smallest sin deserves just damnation, and pride is a trap for the unwary, who say that only they have the true righteousness. Repent, O ye of little faith, and honor thy God in peace through all the days of your life, until the Sounding shall be heard, and the Kingdom shall be at hand."

There was more of it, and Bailey was surprised to hear some of it in languages which he hadn't known Warren could speak. Much of it made little sense to a man who had previously known nothing of the peculiar ideas of some of the sects and religions. But it was effective, against the Revelation the leaders had seen. A wave of physical compassionate understanding was spreading through them, and a brown-skinned Arab was hugging a thin-lipped Israelite and both were chanting something about there being no God but God, and Allah being His Name.

WARREN dropped back to Bailey's side. "God is good, and His Justice is mighty. But we should have another miracle to restore these holy men to their troops, to end the Wars. And we should be back at the Temple—the storm is increasing, and I'm afraid the plane won't get free from it now."

Bailey had noticed that. But he merely nodded, a vague memory of their first teleportation entering his thoughts, almost as if it came from outside, without his will. He swung about automatically and began moving toward the glow. And strangely, there was no resistance from the wind, and the ground under him seemed smooth and easy to travel.

He reached the edge of the rosy aura and touched it, as Warren had done at the first Revelation, hardly aware of what he was doing. There was no resistance. His arm sank into it, and he stumbled forward, numbness shooting over him as he passed completely inside it, without hindrance. Somewhere, emotions beyond any description hit him, but he only knew he should feel them, without the conscious sensation of them.

Then he was back out again, mysteriously beside Warren, and the ex-missionary was reaching for him, still trying to perform a miracle that would restore the leaders to their place and the two back to San Francisco. Warren's hand touched him, and the leaders were suddenly gone, while the lights of the Temple suddenly appeared around him.

He stood there, feeling a numb, aching despair and a certainty that the Wars would end now, while a clamoring beat surged over him. Then the shocked cries of Warren and the council of apostles struck at him, and he looked down at himself, to see a rosy glow coming from him, reaching out slowly, while a tiny thread of the glow seemed to stretch back and back toward the Place of the Being. Was this something new? It

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seemed . . .

He dropped the thought, and opened his mouth, trying to understand what he was saying, trying to find something that was lost in the dim, primitive levels of his feeble, animal mind, something that could be put into mouth words. Things were getting dim, and he knew he was slowly burning out under the drive of the glow, like an over-voltaged bulb. But there was no level low enough to reach, and only a shred of a phrase came to his lips.

" . . . the fruit of the tree of Good *and* Evil . . . "

It was useless. The glow sprang up and poured into the little thread, while an animal cry of anguish and failure rose to Bailey's lips. Then there was neither consciousness or lips, and only a bit of dust floated to the ground where he had been, unnoticed by the apostles who had bent to the floor in front of him.

Warren looked up, wondering vaguely why Bailey had not been returned with him. Then he sighed and turned back to urgent business.

VI

HIRAM Judson looked out grimly through the little one-way mirror he had installed, and inspected the figure outside. He looked again, scowled, and reached toward the door. Then he reconsidered.

"Peace," he chanted carefully. "Shall we pray for Grace?"

Doc Smidt's voice started in a chuckle that cut off doubtfully. "Hi? Stop being a damned fool and open the door. All I've seen is a bunch of nuts, and if you're one, I'll go back to the Amazon, where the monkey people make more sense."

Judson grinned suddenly, and began unbolting the locks on the door, most of them obviously made from things lying around the lab. He didn't waste words, but reached out and yanked the little philologist inside, thumping him on the back.

"Coffee?" He led the way back into the lab, where a Bunsen burner had been found in an out of the way bin and pressed into service as a hot-plate. The stainless steel sheets had made fair cooking utensils; it had been all he could carry when he stocked up with food from his home. He flipped a couple of tired eggs over with a quick gesture, pulled out some hand-hammered plates, and began shoving food at Smidt. "No sugar, darn it. You see what happened outside? And what brings you back? Last poker session, you were going to try Goldman's serum on some monkeys."

Smidt began eating with a fine disregard for a few missing forks, using a chisel fairly effectively. "Experiment contaminated — all the monks are smart by now. Don't take sugar. And I saw too much in fifteen minutes to care for more. I figured you'd be sane, so I hunted you up, pronto, fresh off the Piper. When you going to learn civilized conversation. And suppose you fill me in."

Judson began, hesitantly, until he saw that Smidt's face began to take

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on a note of belief. Then he went ahead with gusto, cutting the television on. Smidt must have received a tough dose of it at first, though he had obviously missed the apostles.

Damn the apostles! Judson could take the converts, apparently, but the first apostle Eckstein had brought around had almost caught him. If he hadn't been watching in a sheet of polished chrome, he'd have gone under before the gazabo could finish his passes at the trick alloy. At that, one corner had stayed heat-treated for three days.

Now he'd installed sheets over all the windows, and put up filters over the mirror at the entrance, so he seemed to be safe.

"If I can find out what makes that alloy tick," he finished, "I'll let 'em come in, if they like. I've almost got it. It's a trick balance of magnetism and diamagnetism, with something else, between the atoms in the crystal lattice. Disturbs the binding force, and that pulls the shells of the electrons around. Be the biggest thing in physics when I get it."

Smidt nodded, cleaning up the last of the egg. "Religions! My trouble, too. Who started this?"

"God. I've about decided it must be God—or a god, at least. Those miracles are on the level, and Whoever is fixing that space ship isn't from this earth. Of course, God doesn't explain anything, and adds one more factor to account for in the scheme of things—but sometimes the simplest solution isn't the best. If He exists, I'll fit Him into my theories—after I find the trick with that alloy."

"Praise God, and He exists!" The voice was ecstatic, and they swung about to see the hunger-thinned figure of Eckstein inside the locked door. "Oh, praise Him. I have loved you as a brother, Hiram Judson, and have ceased not in my efforts until power was provided to release you from the error of your ways. Praises, hosannah!"

"Hosannah!" another voice echoed, and a man in a tattered business suit came through the closed door, not bothering to acknowledge that solid wood existed. For a moment, he was obviously Tod Cribben, the banker.

Then he was only an apostle, who had seen God—as was the second apostle who came through the door, to be followed by two more. The big hammer dropped from Judson's hands, and he stood looking at the apostles, no longer resenting them. A flood of redemption rolled over him, and the pettiness of his whole life passed before him. But he could feel no shame.

His mind was tabulating a God who could be seen by men with such an effect, and his thoughts were flooding out to welcome it, as an idea. Beside him, Smidt had fallen slowly to the floor and was praying, but Judson only half heard that.

"So God is wonderful," Judson acknowledged. "I acknowledge all that is good in Him."

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THE apostles stared at him, doubtfully, but there was no real question. Judson supposed he was expected to act like Smidt, but to a man who has learned to accept ring-theory and the exchange forces of nuclear behavior, even the addition of Divinity made no major change in thinking. He stepped aside as the apostles approached the sheet of alloy, and his heart ached at the work that would be undone. But if it was God's Will, as evidenced by those who had been close to Him, then it had to be.

He wished futilely that he could snatch out a tiny bit of the misbehaving alloy, but it was already too late. The apostles stepped back, nodding to Eckstein. "The source of your friend's error has been made as it was intended, and his mind will now rest in Saving Grace. This metal is like the other you described."

For a second, the apostle turned a compassionate face toward him. "You may take some of the metal if it has sentimental value to you. God is Just."

"Useless," Judson said flatly. Now the world would never know — the metal was normal, pure, undefiled— and man's chance to tap the energy of the nuclear forces directly was gone for good. But keeping the ruined experiment around would be of no use to anyone. "Why bother to waste all this effort in saving me, though?"

"The glorious Warren has explained it repeatedly over the television," the chief apostle told him, but without unkindness. "Until evil has been uprooted and good shall triumph completely — until the most stiff-necked shall be meek to inherit the earth—the Blessed Coming has been postponed. God demands we heal ourselves, before the Day shall be. He hides His Face from us and waits."

"And you mean you're to the point where you pick up a few individuals?"

"Perhaps a hundred," the apostle agreed. "We have been thorough in the cleansing of the Lord; we have gleaned well. Since our other leader Bailey sacrificed himself that the Wars might end, and since the Golden Glory of the Lord was made manifest to us within our Temple —I was blessed to see it, though many were so close that the memory was burned from their minds — all has gone well. Bless you. Shall we pray?"

Judson nodded, and fell to his knees, watching as the apostle gestured, lifting hunks of metal aside by sheer levitation to make room for the circle. There must be some rule and order to these complete upsets in all the normal order of the universe. He . . .

Suddenly he was on his feet. "God is All," he admitted, "but it occurs to me that I am needed elsewhere. I feel the call to be of greater good to the Cause. It occurs that those miracles could be put on a more solid basis with a little sound science."

"Let us pray," the head apostle

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shided him gently.

Judson started to protest, his eyes going to the metal that was now a simple alloy, a trail toward knowledge now contaminated by being restored to normal. Then Grace swept over him, and he dropped meekly beside Smidt, lifting his voice in the old chants the others began. It was wonderful to be saved! But . . .

VII

WARREN'S tired eyes were filled with bliss as he climbed out of the plane and headed toward the Temple. There would be no more flights needed. The last recalcitrant had been found, and had been brought into line. He stopped momentarily at the huge piles of food that lay at the Temple entrance. This was unusual—all was of first quality, obviously, without the usual spoilage of common miracles.

Then his eyes found those of Hiram Judson, and he smiled benevolently, blessing the scientist. "You have succeeded?"

"Simple," Judson told him. "It's a matter of the right attitude. I told you about it."

There was no use repeating it. He'd been forced to the decision that God was supernatural, and that miracles also were. They had no place in usual natural law. They could only be explained by assuming that there were two sets of natural laws, one used normally and working on logic; one plus one didn't have to equal two, but it had to equal some fixed thing. The other set of laws existed in a state of quiescence, normally, but could supersede the usual; and they worked by a lack of normal logic, where one plus one was a totally meaningless noise. Any thought of logic—even elementary grade-school logic—corrupted their use.

"Bless you, brother Judson," Warren murmured, his thoughts filled with greater things. "For this you shall sit on my right hand at the new Zion, where we have builded a temple upon a height that overlooks the very Site of the Sign of the Coming. You shall see God in His Infinite Wisdom ascend into the Heavens and draw all men into His Reign."

"Then you have found them all?"

Warren nodded, and only the compassion in his gaze saved him from smugness as his fingers smoothed back the soft waves of his hair. "The last has been converted. Praise God and the blessed martyr Bailey. He was my brother in Peace, you know."

Judson had heard the story, as the apostles had reconstructed it, without too much conviction. He wondered sometimes at his lack of complete conversion—and yet, he knew he was one with the others in the desire to worship the Creator, and completely without doubts of that Creator. He had a bad habit of waking up nights, dreaming for a final second of Smidt and his monkeys, Bailey and whatever had happened, and the alloy that was useless now. And yet, it was but right that he should serve the apostles to further the Coming of the Being beside the

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Ship!

Even Warren seemed tired now, as if the fire that had carried him through the final conversion had been burned lower, with accomplishment. Of course, it might be too steady a dose of miracle food that had sapped his strength; the deaths lately had taken an alarming upward trend, though it was small matter when all knew that the graves should be opened and the righteous should step forth on the Day.

"The other apostles have left for the new Zion," Judson told Warren. "They passed themselves there by a miracles, having avoided the errors in their thinking. I'm to take you."

He didn't wait for Warren's nod, but touched the former missionary's hand, moving it in a curious gesture. Alone, he could not perform miracles, but he could use the power of those who could more effectively than they could. Praise God for the genius he had been granted that he might serve!

He grinned wryly at his own phrases, even while he meant them. Then they were in the new temple at the edge of the howling storm that now covered fifty miles of radius and had long since made it impossible for other men to become apostles by seeing the Being. But the temple was on an elevation, and the spy instruments still pierced through, showing what went on around the Ship of the Being.

For a second, the apostles looked up. Warren made a signal, and a sigh went up. But it wasn't what had been expected. There was a curious doubt in it. Warren sensed it, and gazed quickly toward the huge television screen that covered one wall in glowing colors.

THE Being was still busy about the Ship, harder to see now, but still outside. And that was wrong! The world was perfect; God should accept it now.

A tremor ran through Warren's figure, and then it straightened. "God is Just," he chanted. "In our folly, we have been sure that all was well. But still the Day comes no nearer. All is a vanity, and evil still rampages over the face of the earth. The dark forces have not been overcome. The Lord withholds His Hands. Find the recalcitrant, O brothers, lest the Day be too long delayed!"

"But how?" one of the apostles cried out, and the hunger in his voice for the Millenium to arrive was a physical thing as it echoed through the single chamber of the new temple.

"Oh ye of little faith! By prayer for Guidance!" Warren dropped to his knees and began to lead them.

For a second, Judson could feel his knees buckling as he tried to follow suit. But something quivered in the back of his mind—probably one of the keenest and best trained minds in the old world—now only a stumbling block to the complete faith he wanted to share with the others.

But could he be the cause of God's

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withholding the Day? Would his minor doubts be enough?

He tore at his mind, straining toward the screen where the Being still moved cloudily, longing toward the ancient faith of his ancestors, while the monkeys and the alloy swam before his thoughts, and doubts began to come. Doc Smidt was lucky . . . Doc Smidt . . .

But it wasn't his mind that was repeating the name. It was the voice of the apostle who had brought Saving Grace and Peace to Doc and to him in the laboratory.

"Doc Smidt! Doc Smidt! Hear me, I say, for I have seen a vision. Praise be unto God, for He has guided my thoughts, and I have found the recalcitrants."

The hush was absolute, but Judson was nodding even as the apostle began dredging up the facts—either out of his stimulated memory or from some Divine Inspiration. The savages near Doc's Amazon headquarters had been reported, of course—but Doc had been new in the Faith, and he had stated they were extremely filled with Faith. Now the apostle was remembering that Doc had not said which faith, but had even indicated the faith was strange. He had not yet learned that the advanced apostles used the word for only the True Faith as revealed by the Divine Presence. And it was the hardest place to find, apparently, on the globe, where no scouting planes would have reported life.

There was no time for niceties. Warren held out his hand, and Judson took it. A second later, Doc Smidt stood there, dropping to his knees and confessing the error of his ways and the falsity of his report. His mind had still been corrupt with his resentment at the excessive, though false, faith of the chief.

It was obviously a Divine Guidance—though the doubts in Judson's head went on nagging at him. There was something about the movements of the Being as revealed in the screen . . .

But he moved forward at a gesture, and demonstrated certain gestures and words to the fifty top apostles who gathered into a group and began performing the last miracle, before the Great Miracle should occur, to bring Heaven to earth, and open up the New Way to the Faithful.

VIII

THE forty-three headhunters and their women and children huddled outside the new temple, wailing out something into the teeth of the rising storm, while Doc Smidt began explaining to them. They had been less surprised at the sudden teleportation than might have been expected, but it was hard to convince them that the God Doc was talking of was not the Great Monkey God.

Now, though, they bowed quietly before the massed splendor of the apostles, who had all seen the True Creator, and began a proper prayer as Doc intoned a translation to them.

Judson had seen enough, and he turned back toward the television

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screen.

Then a sigh seemed to go up from the depths of the storm, and a strange quiver and adjustment to slide over the world. He could almost feel the atoms cracking out of their habits, shifting and settling into new. Somewhere, a feeling of total loss and absolute incomprehension mingled with the piling up of reverence and awe that others had tried to describe.

There was a cry of joy from the apostles as they jostled toward the screen. And the action had changed. The Being stood quietly now, before a Ship which was free from blotches, and shining in a full golden haze, rich beyond any description. There was no Thing being used, and the Being was motionless.

A queer quiver again went over the world, and Judson could almost feel pity within him for the strange emotions that touched him and were gone. Then a firmness came, and a resolution. There was no sensation to describe it, but Judson could feel a pattern settle into place.

The Being moved somehow then, and the Ship opened, while the storm cleared rapidly. Slowly, the aura of rosy light began to shrink until it was absorbed into the Being, and was gone.

There was no way of knowing what reactions lay behind motions in a God, but the Divinity there hesitated, and began finally to move into the Ship. Something that might have been an opening went slowly closed, and the golden haze over the Ship quivered.

Outside, the hosannahs and hallelujahs were mounting in a sudden chorus, and the deep voices of the headhunters was blended into it, chanting in English now. Well, they had seen the Being, even if from a distance, and they were now apostles —who could speak all languages, it seemed.

Judson sighed. He could have seen it all in actuality, instead of on a screen, but he had been a fool. Beside him, Doc Smidt sighed, too, and then shook his head "We'll soon all see the Glory of His Coming, Hi."

Judson nodded, trying to comfort himself with it. But now other things were happening. The haze quivered about the Ship again, and began to draw into strange orbits and spirals that reminded Judson of some of his efforts to depict the flow of binding forces around the alternating protons and neutrons of a nucleus of fair complexity. Only this was something that could be felt, and not quite perceived.

Then the Ship began to rise!

It was too much. Judson and the others went tearing out, into the suddenly bright sunlight of the Gobi, staring upward as the strange Ship rose into the sky, describing what was neither a spiral nor an exponential curve, but seeming to be both at the same time, yet something more.

It went up into the sky, mounting higher and higher. Then the sky screamed, high and shrill, like the birth pangs of a woman in labor—

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like all the birth pangs since time began. The sun seemed to lose brilliance, and the heavens to run together into a great bowl of brass. Again the scream came, and now the sky was clear—clear as crystal, with even the stars standing out against utter blackness, though the air was still rich, and the sun still shone with its normal brightness.

The Ship was gone too far for visibility, and yet it could be seen. Perhaps it was moving faster than the speed of light, but it seemed simply to change from something in the sky to something going somewhere else, infinitely far, without transition —yet to move on leisurely.

"God is ascending," Warren muttered. And then the fat in his throat caught, and he choked. "But . . . "

Surprisingly, before Judson's eyes, the hair began to come out of the man's head, and his face to sag and grow gaunt. The former missionary ran his hand over his bald head, and somehow it seemed to give him an odd confidence. Judson scanned the others hastily, but the apostle who had regrown a missing leg still had his miracle intact, and none of the others were showing the signs that had hit Warren.

THE missionary gathered himself together, and seemed to fill out again, though his baldness remained.

"God has gone to get the Heavenly Host. Sing Hosannah," Warren cried out, and his voice was thunder that echoed and beat across the barren plains of the desert. "Praise God, and welcome Him back with the Angels. We who have cleansed ourselves of all evil shall fear no evil. Yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we shall fear no evil. His rod and His staff, they comfort us, and we shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever. Oh, praise God, from Whom all blessings go."

He swung about to face them, his own visage transfigured until it was no longer fat and dull in benevolence. Judson caught his breath, seeing a miracle of Faith that was greater than the mere superimposed faith of a man who has seen God. This was the raw basic stuff that had driven outward in the olden days, carrying with it a religion, and making that religion something real in the hearts of those who could not be bolstered by apostles.

"Even as to Moses, so has it come unto me," Warren was crying. "I have been chosen to lead you out of the wilderness of evil and lack of faith. The Lord my God has shown unto me a promised land, rich in milk and honey; He has fed us upon manna, and his Ark now has gone on ahead. But unto me He has promised that I shall see it, but that I shall not go over thither. Bless ye, children of my Revelation, and keep stout your hearts. My day is finished, nor shall even the Clarion Call bring forth my dust. Now have I seen that the fate of my friend Bailey was to be consumed utterly by the Glory which we knew not was of *him* through God. Have faith and ye

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shall triumph!"

There was no glow of rosy light over Warren—only the glow that his own faith and character had suddenly spread over him. The man made a sudden series of gestures, surely and without faltering, too fast for Judson to guess.

Then he ceased, and a mist seemed to hide the figure, dissolving outward into a steam that was gone, leaving a cloud of dust to fall earthward, as it had done when the mantle of God had proved too much for the flesh of Bailey.

Judson caught his breath, and for a blind instant, the full faith he had sought came over him.

Then reaction set in, and the doubts rose again, stronger than ever. His eyes wandered upward to where a tiny, supernal speck of brilliance still pin-pointed the sky. And he caught his breath in a gasp that was echoed by others.

From the speck that was the Ship, a thin, almost two-dimensional light leaped out, spanning the millions of miles to the sun with a total lack of elapsed time. It touched, and was gone.

Judson looked back toward the Ship, but it was gone along with the lance of fire. And something cold and dead began to seep up from his mind's depths, riding over the faith that was still in him—the faith of one who has known men who have seen their Creator, and which can never be quenched.

But the reason that had been suppressed began to throw out the hidden facts, and the intuition which could assemble those facts went to work, piecing out the death of Bailey—a strange and pointless death from a God who had touched a man only to babble what seemed nonsense. He coupled that with the feeling he had had when the last of the faithless were converted, and all of the world was alike in its goodness. Evil had ceased and the world had sighed.

He remembered the picture of Doc Smidt as he visualized it—Doc seeing his experiment blasted beyond hope, and turning without a word of recrimination to abandon it and return to a pointless life.

He remembered his own reaction against the destruction of the one piece of metal alloy which had gone completely bad, and from that could have taught him half the unknown facts of the basic universe.

Slowly he counted out the minutes. Five hundred seconds from the sun to the earth. About eight minutes—and seven of them were gone.

Beyond him, the hosannahs were rising with renewed fervor. Well, they had faith. So did he, against all his knowledge. And in his heart was only love of his Creator—something that could never desert him, whatever thoughts he might have of experiments that were contaminated by accident, and made useless.

He still had faith when the eight minutes were up, but his eyes were watching, expecting it.

The sun went out.

THE END

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PERSONALS

E. K. Everett, P. O. Box 513, Tacoma, Wash., wants the following E. R. Burroughs: The Mucker, The Man Without A Soul, The Moon Maid, Tanar of Pellucidar, and Back To The Stone Age . . . *Large collection of stf magazines dating back to* 1926 *for sale. All are in excellent condition. William Bucci,* 299 *East* 162 *St., New York* 56, *N. Y.* . . . Fans between the ages of 15 and 18 in the Dorchester-Brookline, Mass., area interested in joining a new stf club please get in touch with Robert Swartz, 106 Floyd St., Dorchester 24, Mass., tel. AV 2-3595 . . . *Ray Schaffer, Jr. is interested in forming a fan club in the Akron-Canton, Ohio district. His address is* 122 *Wise St., North Canton, Ohio* . . . One copy of The Outsider, by Lovecraft; in perfect condition with Virgil Finlay dust-jacket for sale. Send bids to Carl E. Wollard, 1369 Aloha St., Davison, Michigan . . . *James D. Sutherland, University of Richmond, Va., has a collection of* '48, '49 & '50 *magazines for sale or will trade for earlier issues, particularly WT prior to* 1940 *or FFM prior to* '45 . . . Dianetics: bc35 1 q one-and-a-half star plus. Box 5206, Phoenix, Ariz. T. Paul . . . *San Diego fans who have not already joined the San Diego Science Fiction and Fantasy Society are invited to do so. Contact Roger Nelson,* 4070 *Georgia, San Diego, Calif* . . . Roger also needs material for Worlds Of Tomorrow, which sells for 20c to N3F member and 25c to non-members . . . *George Williams,* 1302 *Senier Terrace Dr., Kingsport, Tenn. wants to buy back issues of stf, fantasy and weird magazines or good stf and fantasy books. Please send title, date condition and price* . . . Would like to correspond with any and all fans in and around Chicago. Am 18, and have been a fan for a year and a half without having met a fellow-fan, so please write. Miss Avis Melander, 1308 Wellington Avenue, Chicago 13 . . . *Would like to buy WT prior to* '47. *Please state condition, date and price. Jeffrey Russell,* 3 *Orchard Lane, Berkeley* 4, *Calif* . . . Howard De Vore has 800 magazines and books (including such items as Clayton Astoundings, '28 AS, FFM, Unknowns, Golden Fleece, etc.) which he will sell or trade for pre '39 aSF, '26 & '27 AS, Amazing Annual, Magic Carpet, Oriental Stories and pre '34 WT. His address is 16536 Evanston St., Detroit 24, Mich. . . . *David A. Bates, RFD No.* 1, *Claremont, New Hampshire, has some* '35 *Terror Tales and other magazines for sale. Write for prices* . . . Wanted: Mag of Fantasy and Stf, No. 1; OW 1 & 2; Dec, '48 & Jan. '49 aSF. Will sell or trade '48 From Unknown Worlds (cover missing). Write William Purdy, 14339 Emelita St., Van Nuys, Calif . . . *Bob Silverberg and Saul Diskin,* 760 *Montgomery Street, Brooklyn* 13, *publish Spaceship, now in its second year of catering to fan interests.* 10c *a copy,* 3 *issues for* 25c . . . Bob Silverberg, address above, is interested in buying promags prior to '43, particularly Unknown and aSF; also, non-stf mags such as Argosy, Blue Book and Colliers which contain fantasy and old fanzines. Please state condition . . . *For quick results try the OW Personals column. It's yours for free—send in your notices.*

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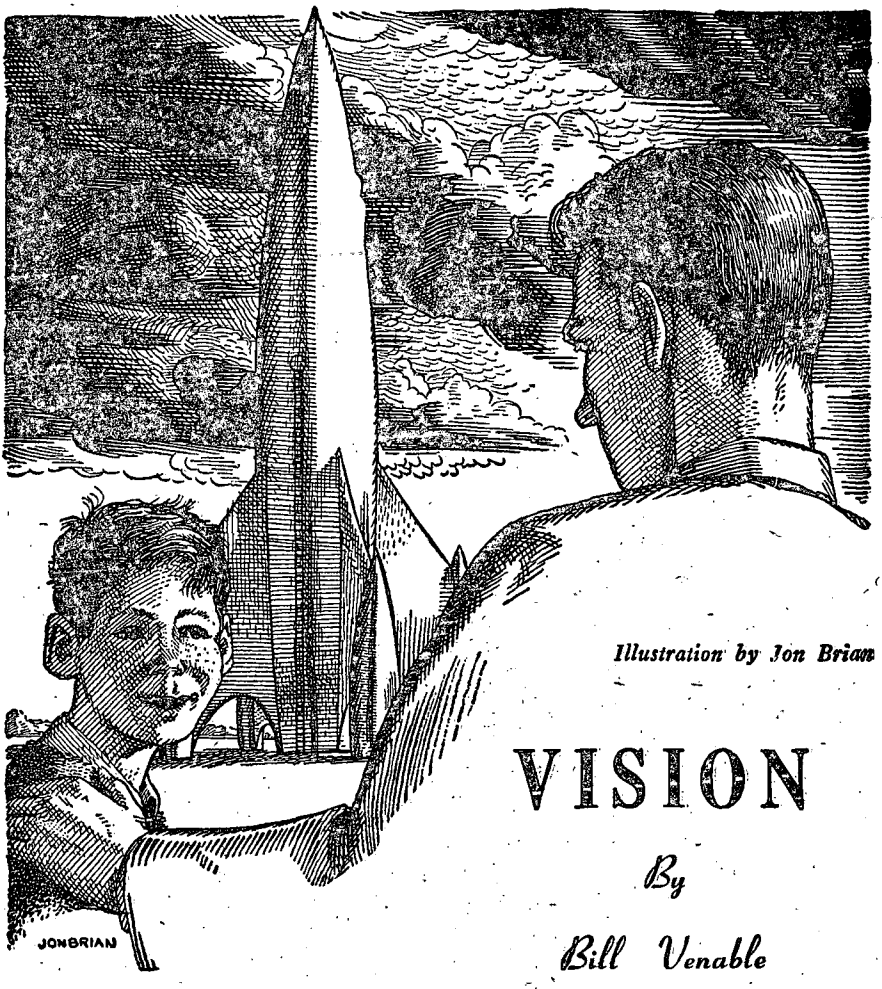

Illustration by Jon Brian

VISION

By

Bill Venable

"IT'S underneath the machine, sir," said the small boy.

Nielson turned around, startled, "Huh?"

"Underneath the machine. There." The boy pointed a finger.

"What is?"

"The blue— the piece of paper you're looking for."

Nielson stooped dutifully and gazed beneath the bulk of the ato-generator. He reached in and pulled forth the blueprint he had been hunting. Then he turned and faced the boy.

"How did you know?"

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Donny Slade could see things—only these were things that ordinary persons couldn't see. Things that hadn't happened yet . . .

"I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea;
But I know how the heather looks,
And what a wave must be . . ."

—Emily Dickinson

"Why, I just knew. I thought you knew, too, until I saw you didn't."

"How did you get in here?" asked Nielson, still slightly nonplussed.

"I saw the door was unlocked, so I walked in."

"What for?"

"I'm hungry," said the boy. "I haven't had anything to eat all day . . . "

The noon whistle blew.

"Come on," said Nielson, preparing to lock up the shop.

* * *

The boy had steady blue eyes and a high, wide forehead; his lips pouted slightly, and his hair was tousled. Nielson watched him down the last gulp of coffee and wipe his lips with a napkin. The boy had on a striped polo shirt and faded blue overalls. His shoes were new.

"What's your name?" asked the boy.

"Rod Nielson. What's yours?"

"Donny Slade. But at the railroad yard they call me Kid."

"Finished?" Nielson asked.

The boy nodded. Then he asked, "Mister Nielson, may I go back to the shop with you?"

"Huh?"

"I ain't got noplace else to go," the boy volunteered shyly, "and I like to watch you work."

Nielson studied him. "Where's your folks, Donny?"

"I ain't got any folks," the boy said. "I used to, but my father died an' my ma ran off with another man. My pa used to work here," he added.

Nielson made a mental note to look up the name Slade in the company books after hours.

NIELSON bent over the circuit-diagrams for the ato-generator. The wiring of the *beta* circuit was complete, and the *delta* needed but the secondary power circuits connected.

Deftly, he cut a bit of wire and ran a lead from the terminal on the outside of the lead-shielded plutonim slow-fission pile to a resistor shown in the diagram. Two leads ran from the resistor, one through a minute vacuum tube the size of a marble, the other to a switch through which it could be grounded.

On the far end of the workbench two wires ran from an electric motor, an incandescent lamp, and a

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buzzer connected in parallel to terminals on the generator. Nielson soldered a connection in place, then stood up and surveyed his work with evident satisfaction.

"It won't work," said the boy, abruptly.

"Eh?" Nielson turned around. "What won't work?"

"The machine," the boy looked distracted.

"Why not?"

"Because— it just won't work." the boy reiterated from his seat on an orange-crate.

Nielson thoughtfully closed the switch. Where there should be a light, the *brrr* of a door buzzer, the purr of a motor, there was— nothing. Nielosn remembered the blueprint. He turned to Donny.

The boy was gazing thoughtfully into space.

"Donny."

"Yes."

"Can you tell me why it won't work?"

"The 'lectricity. It isn't running the right way. From the plu— from the big lead box."

Nielson reversed the leads to the lead-enclosed fission pile. The light lit; the buzzer rang; the motor whirred softly. He shut off the current, turned toward the boy.

"It's at your home— in the third drawer in your bureau, under the cam'ra," said Donny Slade.

"What is, kid?"

"Your cig'rette lighter."

"I didn't say anything about my lighter."

"You were thinkin' it, though. You were wonderin' if I cud tell you—"

Nielson cut him off. "Come on . . . we're going to see the boss!"

He scribbled something on the blueprint and rolled it up. "That mistake would have taken me a week's calculation to locate; you did it for me in a minute. They'll let you name your salary, Donny Slade! Let's get going!"

JA.!" Nielson cried. "This boy—it's amazing! He—"

"Amazing, eh? You'll be amazed when you see the latest bulletin from the Board. Nielson, we're three days behind our promises!" Boss Conner matched Nielson's enthusiasm with a choleric irritability.

"But it's incredible, Conner! This boy—"

"Credible, shmedible! Forget the boy-oyoyoyoy—*BOY!*"

"Yes sir, he —"

"I don't care if he spits gold bricks. Do you think this is a nursery? This is a *private* office— GED THAT BOY OUDDA HERE!"

"Wait in the outer office, Donny," mumured Nielson.

Donny obediently retreated. Conner glared at Nielson. Hard.

"Mis-ter Nielson!" The older man's breathing labored. His cheeks were puffy. "Do you think my reasoning faculties are in any way impaired?"

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"Why— no, sir."

"Do you think I am stupid? Unreasonable?"

"Er—No—"

"Then I'm sure you'll agree with me that it's not unreasonable to prohibit ten-year-old boys from running around in the private offices of Atomic Industries, Incorporated."

"But this particular boy—"

"Boy, shmoy. What about a particular atomic generator we promised the government would be ready three days ago?"

"Oh, that's all ready. You can have Jennings draw up blueprints from my model."

"Jenn—I thought *you* were building the model from *Jennings* blueprints."

"Uh huh. 'Till I found out they were wrong."

"Nielson, I don't care whose fault it *was*—now. We've got the generator, and that's the important thing. It isn't every company that gets a government contract to design and build the first manned space-ship. We pulled that contract right out from under the noses of International Atomics, and we're going to keep it." He reached across the desk and shook hands in a business-like fashion. "Congratulations, Nielson, I'm giving you a pay raise and transferring you as of today to the Jet division. But wait'll you see that bulletin. I tell you, that ato-generator means everything to us." He rummaged in his desk. "Now, where did I put that damned—"

"Mister Nielson!" Donny called from the outer office.

"Excuse me, J. A.," muttered Nielson. "I'll be right back." He vanished into the outer office. A minute later he was back. He took out a cigarette and lit it with a paper match.

"The bulletin's in your bottom left drawer. It's locked, and you have the key in your vest pocket."

"Eh?" said Conner. "How did you know?"

"Look and see," replied Nielson calmly.

Conner reached into his vest pocket and changed color. He took out the key, unlocked the specified drawer, rummaged, and withdrew the bulletin, looking at Nielson queerly.

"Nielson, how did you know all that?"

Nielson exhaled streamers of smoke. "Donny told me."

"Don . . . ." Conner looked toward the outer office, the question in his eyes. Nielson nodded.

"Call him in here," Conner muttered.

Donny came before Nielson could get the words out. "The telephone's going to ring," he volunteered.

It rang.

Nielson looked at Conner; Conner nodded. Then he picked up the phone.

THE spaceship gleamed a ruddy copper-color in the setting sun,

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as the last of the workmen filed through the gate. Donny Slade and Rod Nielson stood by the fence, admiring the sleekness of her, the triumph of her, Mankind's challenge to the stars. Nielson laid his hand on Donny's shoulder.

"You did it, Donny," he said. "She belongs to you, really."

Donny's eyes shone. "You did the work, Mister Nielson. I didn't do nothin' really, 'cept tell you what would happen. It wasn't work."

"We'd still be struggling with her now, if it hadn't been for you, Donny."

"Are *you* goin' to the moon in her, Mister Nielson?"

"The moon first; then Mars, Venus— everywhere, Donny. And you're going, too. We'll need you, Donny, out in space."

Donny said, "Mister Nielson, can I look inside her again?"

"Sure, Donny." Nielson watched the small form dart off toward the hatch-ladder. He thought, "'And a small child shall lead them!'"

"Mister Nielson!" Nielson looked up and saw Donny about halfway up to the hatch. "Mister Nielson! Help! The ladder's goin' to break!" It shuddered. *"Mister Nielson!"*

Nielson ran. He was a good fifty yards away, and already the ladder was quivering. Donny was about twenty feet up. If he fell—Nielson ran harder.

"Mister Nielson! You're gonna be too late! It's breakin'—"

The ladder cracked. He pelted toward the small form falling through the air. It hit the ground with a dull thump.

* * *

The doctor came out of the company infirmary emergency office. He came toward Nielson.

"How is he, Doc? Is he hurt?"

"No, the boy's okay. Miraculously, there're no broken bones—only a few cuts and bruises. He's conscious now."

Thank God. "Can I see him? He'll still be able to go along to the moon?"

"No," Doctor Phelps' voice was kindly. "He'll never be able to see the moon—now. You see, that blow on the head jarred something in his brain. He's lost his ESP."

"But he can still—"

". . . See? No, Mr. Nielson. That was never possible anyway." Sympathy shone in the doctor's gray eyes, "Donny has been blind from birth."

THE END

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SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEWS

MAKE MINE MAGIC

Robert Heinlein's SIXTH COLUMN (*Gnome Press*, $2.50), reviewed here last September, was the story of the genesis of an atomic religion set up by an underground of American scientists who used the seemingly magical effects of the Ledbetter Effect to drive out an Asiatic invader. Now Fritz Leiber, in GATHER, DARKNESS (*Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York*, 1950, 240 p. $2.75) shows what the aftermath of this invention might be after a few centuries of inbreeding and enjoyment of power. Although they were not written as companions, the two books can certainly be read and enjoyed as such.

Let us suppose that the Heirarchy of scientific magic set up in the Heinlein book has continued until the year 2305 of our current "Dawn Civilization." It has the common people well under its thumb, living in misery to perpetuate its own comfort. It has invented witchcraft as an opposition, to give it ample opportunities to impress its power on the people through forceful little object lessons. And then that witchcraft becomes real and threatens to overthrow the Heirarchy!

The gathering of the "darkness" of the new witchcraft is the story of Mr. Leiber's memorable book. It has a variety of heroes—the priest Jarles, who revolts against his Great God, is "remade" by the laboratories of the Heirarchy, and who fights his way back to self determination — the Black Man, symbol of the Witchcraft and leader of its underground—and by no means least, little Dickon, the Black Man's "familiar."

The familiars are the finest touch in the book — creepy, yet pathetic and real. They are miniature, grotesque "twins" of the men and women from whose own cells they have been created—furry little monsters, made to conform with the popular ideas of witchcraft, yet all too human. Since their vital organs have been dispensed with, they must sup their big brothers' blood and live on the food dissolved in it. As true twins, each pair have a telepathic link which makes the agile little familiars ideal emissaries of the resistance. Some seem little more than automatons, but a few, like Dickon, are gaining personalities of their own and perhaps heralding a new race.

A plot as intricate and agile in its twists as any of van Vogt's makes real this world of the 24th century and keeps the reader very thoroughly confused as to who is fighting whom and how.

Magic is also the theme of the two short novels by Robert Heinlein in WALDO AND MAGIC, INC. (*Doubleday & Company, Garden City*. 1950. 219 p. $2.50) In WALDO it is only apparent—at least, we may assume that the forces which the old Pennsylvania Dutch hex doctor, Grandfather Schneider, commands are as real as the scientific forces commanded by the Witchcraft in Leiber's book. In MAGIC, INC. however it is completely real and entirely hilarious, treated with the respectful disrespect of the Pratt-de Camp "incomplete enchanter" stories.

Waldo Farthingwaite Jones, so fat and feeble that he must live in an orbital sphere in order to be weightless, is also the world's greatest inventive genius, who has turned the gadgets he invents to save himself effort into devices which he can

(*Continued on Page* 53)

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HEROES ARE MADE

By Poul Anderson & Gordon Dickson

When you're attached to the Terrestrial Interstellar Survey Service you soon get accustomed to unusual life - forms; but this, thought Ensign Jones, was too much!

ALEXANDER Jones woke up slowly and lay there for a while wishing he hadn't. An all-day hike on an empty stomach followed by an uneasy attempt at sleep on the ground, plus the prospect of several thousand kilometers of the same, is not conducive to happiness. And those animals, whatever they were, that had been yipping and howling all night sounded so damnably *hungry*.

"He looks human."

"Yeah. But he ain't dressed like no human."

Alexander Jones opened his eyes with a wild feeling of impossibility. The drawling voices spoke—English!

He closed his eyes again, immediately. "No," he groaned.

"He's awake, Tex." The voices were high-pitched, not quite human. Jones curled up into an embryonic position and reflected on the peculiar horror of a squeaky drawl.

"Yeah. Git up, stranger. These hyar parts ain't healthy right now, nohow."

"No," said Jones again. "Tell me it isn't so. Tell me I've gone crazy wandering over this damned prairie, but deliver me from its being real."

"I dunno." The voice was uncertain. "He don't talk like no human."

Jones decided there was no point in hiding from them. They looked harmless, anyway—to everything except his sanity. He crawled to his feet, his bones seeming to grate against each other, and faced the natives.

The first expedition, he remembered, had reported two intelligent races, Hokas and Slissii, on the planet. And these were plainly Hokas—for small blessings give praises! There were two of them, almost identical in appearance—about a meter tall, tubby and golden-furred, with round blunt-snouted heads and small black eyes. Except for the stubby-fingered hands, they resembled nothing so much as giant teddy bears.

The first expedition had, however, said nothing about their speaking English with a drawl. Or about their wearing the dress of Earth's ancient West.

All the American historical stereo-

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"Howdy, stranger, howdy. I'm Tex and my pardner here is Monty."

Illustration by Edd Cartier

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films he had ever seen gibbered in Jones' mind as he assessed their costumes. They wore—let's see, start at the top and work down and try to keep your reason in the process—ten-gallon hats with brims much wider than their shoulders, tremendous bandanas, checked shirts of fantastic wildness, levis and enormously flaring chaps, and high-heeled boots with outsize spurs. Two sagging cartridge belts on each Hoka supported heavy Colt six-shooters which almost dragged on the ground.

One of the natives was standing before the Earthman, the other was mounted a little behind, holding the reins of the first one's—well—his animal. About the size of a pony, and with four hoofed feet—also a whiplike tail, a long neck with a beaked head, and a scaly hide of bright green. But of course, thought Jones wildly, of course they bore Western saddles with lassos at the horn. Of course. Who ever heard of a cowboy without a lasso?

"Wall, I see yo're awake," said the standing Hoka. "Howdy, stranger, howdy." He held out his hand. "I'm Tex and my pardner here is Monty."

"Pleased to meet you," mumbled Jones, shaking hands in a dreamlike fashion. "I'm Alexander Jones."

"I dunno," said Monty dubiously. "He ain't named like no human."

"Are yo' human, Alexanderjones?" asked Tex.

The spaceman wondered, but got a firm grip on himself and said, spacing his words with abnormal care: "I am Ensign Alexander Jones of the Terrestrial Interstellar Survey Service, attached to the T.S. *Draco*." The Hokas looked lost now. He added wearily, "In other words, I'm from Earth. I'm human. Satisfied?"

"I s'pose," said Monty, still doubtful. "But we'd better take yo' back to town with us an' let Slick talk to you. He'll know more about it. Cain't take no chances in these times."

"Why not?" Jones was surprised at the sudden bitterness in Tex's voice. "What we got to lose, anyhow? But come on, Alexanderjones, we'll go on to town. We shore don't want to be found by no stray Injun warbands."

"Injuns?" asked Jones vaguely.

"Shore. The Injuns are comin'. We better get along, then. My pony'll carry double."

Jones was not especially happy at riding a nervous reptile in a saddle built for a Hoka. Fortunately the race was sufficiently broad in the beam for their seats to accommodate a slender Earthman. The "pony" trotted ahead at a surprisingly fast and steady pace. Reptiles on Toka—so-called by the first expedition after the Hoka word for "earth"—seemed to be more highly evolved than in the Solar System, with a fully developed four-chambered heart permitting as much activity as a mammal and a better nervous system all around than the cold-blooded creatures of Earth.

Nevertheless, the pony stank.

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Jones looked around him. It was prairie country, great rolling plains under a high windy sky, endless kilometers of rippling grass, a rare river or waterhole with trees growing about it. In the hazy distance he saw the dim blue line of the hills. Beyond those, he knew, were the mountains, and then the unending forests, and finally the sea near which the *Draco* lay. A hell of a long ways to walk.

" 'Tain't none o' my business, I reckon," said Tex, "but how'd yo' happen to be hyar?"

"It's a long story," said Jones absent-mindedly. He was thinking mostly about food. "The *Draco* was out on one of the exploratory orbits, mapping new systems, you know, and as it happened our course took us close to this star, which had been visited once before as you seem to know. We thought we'd look in and find out how conditions were now, as well as rest ourselves on an Earth-type world. I was one of several who went out in the lifeboats to skim over the continent, but something went wrong, the atomic engines flared up, I barely escaped with my life. I parachuted out, and as bad luck would have it the boat crashed in a river. So— well— I just started hiking toward the ship. Wasn't much else I could do."

"Won't yore pardners come after yo'?"

"Sure, they'll search— but how likely are they to find a half-melted boat on the bottom of a river when they've got half a continent to search? My only chance was that they'd spot me, and that's a little more likely if I'm moving. So— I walked. But it was a rough cob and I'm hungry enough to eat a— a buffalo now."

"Ain't likely to have buffalo meat in town," said the Hoka imperturbably. "But we got good beefsteaks."

"Oh," said Jones.

"Yo' wouldn't'a got for, anyway," said Monty critically. "Ain't got no gun."

"No, I didn't have time to grab my raythrower when the accident happened. I thought I'd have to make a bow and arrows."

"Bow an' arrers—" Monty squinted suspiciously. "What yo' been doin' around the Injuns?"

"I ain't— I haven't been near any Indians in my life!"

"Bows an' arrers is Injun weapons, stranger."

"I wish they was," said Tex mournfully. "We didn't have no trouble back when only Hokas had six-guns. But now the Injuns got 'em it's all up with us. All up with us." A tear trickled down his nose.

If the cowboys are teddy bears, thought Jones insanely, *then who are the Indians?*

"It's lucky for yo' me an' Tex happened to pass by," said Monty. "We was out to see if we couldn't round up a few more steers before the Injuns got here. No such luck, though. The greenskins done rustled 'em all."

Greenskins! Jones remembered what the first expedition's report on Toka had said: Two intelligent rac-

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es, the reptilian Slissii and the mammalian Hokas. And the Slissii, being more strong and agile and warlike, preyed on the Hokas— "Are the Injuns Slissii?" he asked.

"Huh? I don't speak no Injun, hombre."

"I mean— well— are they big tall beings, bigger than I am, but walking sort of stooped over— tails and fangs and green hides, and their talk is sort of hissing?"

"Why, shore. That's the Injuns." Monty shook his head, puzzled. "I thought humans was all so smart. You don't know nothin' from nobody, Alexanderjones."

There was a great dust cloud ahead of them. As they neared, Jones saw that it was raised by a giant herd of—

"Longhorn steers," explained Monty.

Well, yes, only the long horn was on the nose. But the milling "cattle"— red-haired, short-legged, barrel-bodied— were at least mammalian. Jones made out brands on the flanks of the nearer animals. The whole herd was being driven by Hoka cowboys.

"That's the X Bar X outfit," said Tex. "The Lone Rider decided to try an' drive 'em ahead of the Injuns, but I think they'll catch up soon."

"Cain't do much else. All the ranches are drivin' their stock off the range," said Tex. "There just ain't any place we can make a stand. I shore don't intend tryin' to stay in town an' hold off the Injuns, an' I don't think anybody else does either in spite o' Slick an' the Lone Rider wantin' us to."

"Hey," objected Jones, "I thought you said the Lone Rider was fleeing from the Injuns. Now you have him wanting to fight them. What is it?"

"Oh, the Lone Rider who owns the X Bar X is runnin', but the Lone Rider of the Lazy T wants to stay. So does the Lone Rider o' Rattlesnake Gulch, but o' course he may change his mind when the Injuns get as close as they are to our town hyar."

Jones clutched his head to keep it from flying off his shoulders. "How many Lone Riders are there, anyway?" he shouted.

"How should I know?" asked Monty. "I know at least ten myself, an' heard o' 'em everywhere. I gotta say," he added a little exasperatedly, "that English shore ain't got as many names as the old Hoka did. It gets awfully tiresome to have a hundred other Montys around, or yell 'Tex' and have somebody yell, 'Which one?'"

They passed the bawling herd at a rapid jog trot and topped a low rise. Beyond it lay a village, perhaps a dozen small houses and a long narrow street lined with square-built structures. From here, Jones could see that it was jammed with Hokas— on foot, mounted, in covered wagons and buggies— refugees from the approaching Injuns, he decided. As they neared the place, Jones saw a clumsily lettered sign: WELCOME TO CANYON GULCH

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"We'll take you to Slick," said Monty above the hubbub. "He'll know what to do."

They forced their ponies slowly through the swirling, pressing, jabbering throng. The Hokas seemed to be a highly excitable race, much given to arm-waving and shouting at the top of their lungs. There was no organization whatever in the flight, which was proceeding much more slowly than the Injun menace seemed to allow. Many ponies and wagons stood deserted before the saloons, which formed an almost solid double row along the street.

Jones tried to remember what the first expedition had said about the race. There hadn't been much, the ship had only been on Toka a couple of months. But— yes— the Hokas were described as friendly, merry quick to learn— and hopelessly inefficient. Only their walled seacoast towns, in a state of bronze-age culture, had been able to stand off the Slissii raids, otherwise the reptiles had had their way with the Hoka tribes. A Hoka fought bravely enough when he was attacked, but shoved all thought of the enemy out of his cheerful mind whenever the danger was not immediately visible. It never occurred to the Hokas to take the offensive against the Slissii, they could never have organized an army anyway.

A nice, but rather ineffectual little people. Jones felt somewhat smug about his own comparative height, his close-fitting gray spaceman's uniform, and the fighting, slugging, viciously powerful human spirit which had carried man out to the stars.

He'd have to do something about this situation, give these comic-opera creatures a hand somehow. Which would also mean a promotion for Alexander Braithwaite Jones, since Earth needed plenty of worlds with friendly dominant races and the first expedition's report on the Injuns— Slissii, damn it!— showed that they could never get along with man.

A. Jones, hero. Maybe then Mary will—

A fat and elderly Hoka gaped at him, along with the rest of Canyon Gulch. This particular one wore a huge metal star pinned to his vest. "Howdy, Sheriff," said Tex, and snickered.

"Howdy, Tex, my old pal." The sheriff seemed almost obsequious. "An' my good old sidekick Monty too. Yo' found a— *human?*"

"Yep, that we did. Where's Slick?"

"Which Slick?"

"*The* Slick, yo' — yo'— sheriff!"

The Sheriff winced. "I think he's in the back room of the Paradise Saloon," he said. And humbly: "An' Tex— Monty— yo'll remember yore old pal come *ee*lection day, won't yo'?"

"Reckon we might," said Tex genially. "Yo' been Sheriff long enough."

"Oh, thank yo' boys, thank yo'!" beamed the sheriff. "If only enough others will have yore kin' hearts—" The eddying crowd swept him away.

"What off Earth — " exclaimed

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Jones. "What the *hell* was he trying to get you to do?"

"Vote agin him come the next *ee*lection, o' course," said Monty. "Shorely he don't want to be sheriff. Who would?"

"But— the sheriff— he runs the town— maybe?"

Tex and Monty looked bewildered. "Now I really think yo' ain't human after all," said Tex. "Why, the humans taught us that the sheriff was the dumbest man in town. Only we don't think it's fair a man should have to be called that all his life, so we elect 'em once a y'ar."

"Buck there has been *ee*lected three times runnin' now," said Monty. "He's *really* dumb!"

"But who is this Slick?" asked Jones, with a touch of wildness returning.

"The town gambler, o' course."

"But what have I to do with a town gambler?"

Tex and Monty exchanged glances. "Look, now," said Monty patiently, "we done allowed for a lot o' things. But when yo' don't even know what the name of the officer is that runs a town, that's goin' just a little too far."

"What would you call such a man?" asked Tex.

"Why— the city manager—"

"Yo're plumb loco," said Monty firmly. "Ever'body knows a town is run by a town gambler."

SLICK wore the uniform of his office, pants with spats, a black waistcoat, a string tie, diamond stickpin, a Derringer in one pocket and a pack of cards in the other. He looked tired and harried, he must have been under a tremendous strain in the last few days, but he welcomed Jones with eager volubility and took him into his office. Tex and Monty followed, curiously, and the door had to be barred against the trailing crowds.

"Western hospitality," beamed Slick, sending out for sandwiches and drinks. He offered Jones a vile cigar, and lit one himself. "Now," he said, "how soon can we get help from Earth?"

"Not soon, I'm afraid," said Jones. "The *Draco* doesn't know about this, they'll be spending all their time looking for me. Unless they find me here, which isn't likely, they'll never learn about the Injun war."

"How long will they be here, then?"

"Oh, probably a month."

"We can get yo' to the seacoast in that time, I think, but it'd mean takin' a short cut through some territory which the Injuns is between us and it." Slick paused while Jones disentangled that one. "Yo'd hardly have a chance to sneak through. So— it looks like we got to beat the Injuns, an' soon, before yo' can get to yore friends. Only we just cain't beat the Injuns."

Gloom.

More to pass the time than for any other reason, Jones tried to learn the Hoka history. He succeeded beyond expectations, Slick proving surprisingly intelligent and well-

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informed.

The first expedition had landed some thirty-odd years ago. Toka had drawn no Earthly interest, there were so many new planets in the vastness of the Galaxy. It was mere chance that the *Draco* had stopped by again. Eventually, when this section of space got organized, there would be regular contact between all intelligent races, but meanwhile—

The first Earthmen had been met with eager admiration by the Hoka tribe near which they descended. The little beings were linguistic adepts, and between their natural abilities and modern psychographic methods had learned Terrestrial English in a matter of days. To them, the humans were almost gods, though like most primitives they were willing to frolic with their deities.

Came the fatal evening. The expedition had set up an outdoor stereoscreen to show films for its own entertainment. Hitherto the Hokas had been interested but rather bewildered spectators. Now tonight a film was reshown, at Wesley's insistence. It was a Western.

Most spacemen develop intense hobbyhorses on the long an doften monotonous voyages. Wesley's, it seemed, was the old American West. But he tended to look at it through romantic lenses, he had a huge stack of novels and magazines along but very little factual material.

The Hokas saw the stereofilm and went wild.

The captain finally decided that their delirious, ecstatic reaction was due to this being something they could understand. Drawing-room comedies and adventures on far planets meant little to them in terms of their own experiences, but here was a country like their own, heroes who fought savage enemies, great herds of animals, gaudy costumes—

And it occurred to the captain and to Wesley that their little friends could find very practical use for certain elements of the old Western culture. The Hokas were small farmers now, scratching a living out of prairie soil never meant to be plowed; they were slow pedestrians, they fought and worked with bronze and stone—they could do better.

The ship's metallurgist had had little trouble redesigning the old guns, Colt and Derringer and carbine. The Hoka smiths had to be taught how to smelt iron, make steel, and forge the new weapons, but here again native quickness and modern psychography combined to make such instruction easy. Likewise they jumped at the idea of herding the wild beasts they had hitherto hunted, riding others, becoming — cowboys!

Before the ship left, the Hokas were breaking wild "ponies" to the saddle and rounding up "longhorns" for semi-domestication. They were concluding trade treaties with the more civilized agricultural and maritime cities on the coast, meat in exchange for vegetable produce and manufactured goods. And they were gleefully slaughtering every Slissii warband that came against them.

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And— the final step— before he left, Wesley gave his collection of books and magazines to the Hokas.

None of that had been in the report Jones had read, only the brief note that the Hokas had been shown steelworking, the use of chemical weapons, and the benefits of certain types of economic setup. It had been hoped that with this aid the friendly Hokas could subdue the dangerous Slissii so that when man finally started coming here regularly he wouldn't have a war on his hands.

Jones could fill in the rest. The typical Hoka overenthusiasm had run wild. The new culture was, after all, very practical and well adapted to the prairie tribes— so why not go all the way, be just like the human godlings in every respect? Talk English with the stereofilm accent, adopt human names, human dress, human mannerisms, dissolve the old tribal organizations and replace them with ranches and small towns— it followed very naturally. And it was so much more fun than the old ways.

The books and magazines couldn't circulate far, most of the new gospel went by word of mouth. Naturally certain oversimplifications crept in—

And thirty-some years passed. The Hokas matured rapidly, a second wholly Western generation was already well on its way. The past was all but forgotten, it was assumed that the human visitors had been just like the heroes they described. The Hokas spread out over the plains toward the other coast, driving the Injuns before them.

Until, of course, the Injuns learned how to make firearms. Then, with their incomparably greater military abilities, they raised their armies and proceeded to drive the Hokas back. This time, it was believed, they wouldn't stop anywhere short of the coast, they'd destroy the cities there too and kill or enslave the whole Hoka race.

Individual Hokas and small bands fought gallantly, but there just wasn't the organization to hold an army of comparable size together, the species seemed inherently to lack such abilities. So— the end, it seemed.

And one of the Injun armies was roaring down on Canyon Gulch, it could not be many kilometers away now and there was nothing to stop them. The Hokas gathered their women and children and herds and personal belongings from the isolated ranchhouses and fled before the invaders. But with typical Hoka inefficiency, most of the refugees were still in the doomed town, wondering whether to try and hold it or to hurry onward, and meanwhile having just one more little drink while they argued it out . . .

"You mean you haven't even *tried* to stop the Injuns?" asked Jones incredulously.

"What could we do?" shrugged Slick. "Half the Hoka's'd be agin it an' wouldn't fight at all. Half o' those who did come would each have their own little scheme an' when the leader didn't arrange things their way they'd get mad an' walk off. That don't leave so awfully many to

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fight."

"Couldn't you, as the leader, think up some compromise — some plan which would satisfy everybody?"

"O' course not," said Slick stiffly. "My own plan is the only right one."

"Oh, Lord!" Jones bit savagely at the last of his sandwiches. The food had restored his strength and the curious liquid fire the Hokas called whiskey had given him a warm glow of courage and resolution.

"You Hokas just don't know how to fight," he said. "Earthmen do."

"Yo're a powerful fightin' people," agreed Slick. There was an adoration in his beady eyes which Jones had complacently noticed on most of the faces in town. He decided he rather liked it—but after all, a demigod has obligations.

"You also need a leader whom everyone will follow without question," he went on rapidly. "In short, an Earthman. In short— me!"

"Yo' mean yo'll go out agin the Injuns?"

"I'll lead you," said Jones briskly. "There must be several thousand Hoka males here and they all have some kind of firearms. A tight cavalry charge would split any army wide open."

"Swell!" Slick did handsprings about the office. Even Tex and Monty looked properly awed. "Yahoo!" cried Slick. "I'm a rootin' tootin' son of a gun, I was born with a pistol in each hand an' I teethed on rattlesnakes!" He did a series of cartwheels. "My daddy was a catamount and my mother was a alligator. I can run faster backward than anybody else can run forrad, I can jump over the moon with one hand tied behind me, an if any sidewinder here says it ain't so I'll fill him so full o' lead they'll mine him!"

"What in the Galaxy—" gasped Jones.

"The old human warcry," explained Tex, who had apparently resigned himself to the god's strange ignorance.

"Let's go!" whooped Slick, and threw open the office door. A tumultuous crowd surged outside. The little being inflated his lungs and roared at their highest capacity:

"Saddle yore hosses, gents, an' load yore six-guns! We done got a human back with us, an he's goin' to lead us all out an' wipe out the Injuns!"

The Hokas cheered till the building shook, danced and somersaulted. and fired their guns in the air. Jones gasped and shook Slick, shouting. "—you bloody little fool, not *now*, we have to study the situation, get a plan—"

Too late. The Hoka impetuosity swept him out into the street. He couldn't be heard above the din, he tried to keep his footing in the boiling crowd and was only vaguely aware of details. Someone gave him a six-shooter, he strapped it on as if in a dream. Someone else gave him a lasso, and he heard the voice this time: "Rope yoreself a bronc, Earthling, an' let's go!"

"Rope—" Jones grew aware that a

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great corral had been erected just behind the saloon. The half-wild reptile ponies galloped about inside it, excited by the noise and movement. Hokas were deftly whirling their lariats out to catch the mount they wanted.

"Go ahead!" cried the voice. "Ain't got no time to lose."

Jones looked at a cowboy near him. It didn't seem hard. You held the rope here and here, then you swung the noose around your head like *this*—

He pulled and came crashing down to earth. Through dust and noise, he saw dimly that he had lassoed himself.

Tex pulled him to his feet and dusted him off. Jones tried again, angrily. The rope went about two meters and flopped limply to the ground.

"I— don't ride herd at home," he mumbled.

"I got a bronc for you," cried a Hoka happily. "A real pony with spirit!"

Jones looked at the pony. It looked back. It had an evilly glittering little eye. He decided he didn't like that animal.

"Come on, let's go!" cried Slick impatiently. He was astraddle a wild one, it was still bucking and rearing but he rode it with an ease that hardly noticed.

Jones shuddered, wondered what he had done to deserve this, and climbed aboard his pony. The Hoka let go. So did the pony.

The spaceman had a sudden wild feeling of rising and spinning on something that twisted under him. He grabbed frantically for the saddle horn. The front feet came down with a ten-gee thump and he lost the stirrups. Something on the order of an atomic bomb seemed to explode under him, he had an instant of graceful trajectory, and then he fetched up against the ground.

"Oof!" said Jones and lay still.

A shocked, unbelieving silence fell on the Hokas. The human hadn't been able to use a rope— now he had set a new record for the shortest time in a saddle— *what sort of human was this anyway?*

Jones sat up and looked around a ring of shocked faces. He smiled weakly. "I'm not much of a horseman, either—" he said.

"What the hell are yo', then?" stormed Monty. "Yo' can't rope, yo' can't ride, yo' don't know the simplest things, yo' can't even talk right, yo' can't shoot—"

"Now hold on!" Jones climbed to somewhat unsteady feet. "I admit I'm not used to a lot of things, because on Earth machines do that. But I can outshoot any man here any day in the week, and twice on Sundays!"

Some of the Hokas looked happy again, but Monty simply sneered. "Yeah?"

"Yeah. I'll prove it." Jones looked about for a suitably difficult target. He had no worries now, for a change. He was one of the best raythrower marksmen in the fleet. "Somebody throw up the ace of spades. I'll put

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a hole through the middle."

The Hokas looked awed again. Jones gathered that they weren't very good shots by any standards but their own. Slick smiled, took the ace from his pocket, and spun it into the air. Jones drew and fired.

Unfortunately, raythrowers don't have recoil. Revolvers do.

Jones went over on his back. The slug went off at approximately right angles to the proper line.

The Hokas began to laugh. There was bitterness in the laughter, they had just seen a god crumple to dust, but there was merriment too. They could still enjoy a joke.

"Buck!" cried Slick. "Buck — Sheriff— come here!"

"Yes, sir, Mister Slick sir?" The officer hurried up.

"I don't think we need yo' for sheriff any longer, Buck. I think we just found ourselves another one. Pin yore star on the new sheriff— Alexanderjones!"

When the spaceman had regained his feet, the badge gleamed on his jacket. And the proposed attack was off.

JONES mooched glumly into Pizen's Saloon. Many of the Hokas had already fled in the past few hours, the Injuns were getting horribly near, but some were still delaying for a few last drinks.

Being town buffoon wasn't too bad. The Hokas weren't cruel. But— well— he had just ruined human prestige on Toka for an indefinite period. The Service wouldn't appreciate that.

But he wouldn't be seeing the Service for a long time. He couldn't possibly reach the *Draco* before it left, without passing through territory held by the same Injuns whose army was advancing on Canyon Gulch— and he'd never come alive through them. It might be decades before another ship from Earth landed. He might be marooned here for life. Though come to think of it, that wasn't much worse than the disgrace which would attend his return.

Gloom.

"Here, Sheriff, let me buy yo' a drink," said a voice at his elbow.

"Thanks," nodded Jones. The Hokas did have the pleasant rule that the sheriff was always treated when he came into a bar. Jones had been taking advantage of the fact already, but it didn't seem to lighten his depression much.

This Hoka was a very aged specimen, toothless and rheumatic. "My name's the Gorbugast Kid," he said.

Jones shook hands, dully.

They elbowed their way to the bar. Jones had to stoop under Hoka ceilings, but otherwise the rococo structure was faithful to the saloons of the West. Even to a small stage where three scantily clad Hoka females were going through a song-and-dance number.

The Gorbugast Kid leered. "I know 'em," he sighed. "Cute babies, eh? Zunami an' Goda an' Torigi, that's thar names. If I waren't so danged old—"

"How come they have Hoka

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names?" asked Jones.

"We had to keep the old names for our women when we changed," said the Gorbugast Kid. "It was bad enough with the men, havin' a hundred Texes an' Hopalongs in the same county, but it seemed like yo' humans just got one name for yore gals." He scratched his balding head. "How the hell can you tell yore women apart when they're all named Jane?"

"We have some named 'Hey, you,' too," explained Jones grimly. "And a lot more named 'Yes, dear.'"

His head was beginning to spin. The Hoka rotgut was certainly potent stuff.

Two cowboys were arguing with alcoholic loudness nearby. They were typical Hokas, which meant that to Jones their tubby forms were of almost identical size and appearance. "I know those two, they're from my old outfit," said the Gorbugast Kid. "The one's Slim, the other's Shorty."

"Oh," said Jones vaguely.

He listened to the quarrel, for lack of anything better to do. It had degenerated to the name-calling stage. "Careful what yo' say, Slim," said Shorty, trying to narrow his round little eyes. "I'm a powerful dangerous hombre."

"Yo' ain't no powerful dangerous hombre," sneered Slim.

"I am so too a powerful dangerous hombre!" squeaked Shorty.

"You're a fathead what ought to be kicked by a jackass," said Slim, "an' I'm just the guy who can do it."

"When yo' call me that," said Shorty— "smile!"

"I said yo're a fathead what ought to be kicked by a jackass," repeated Slim, and smiled.

Suddenly the saloon was full of the roar of pistols. Sheer reflex threw Jones to the floor, and a ricocheting slug whanged nastily by his ear. The thunder barked again and again, Jones hugged the floor and prayed.

Silence then. Reeking smoke swirled through the saloon. Hokas crept from behind tables and the bar and resumed their business, casually. Jones looked for the corpses. There were none. Slim and Shorty were putting away their emptied guns.

"I reckon I showed yo', I reckon," said Shorty.

"I fixed yo' up, all right," said Slim. "Come on, I'll buy this round."

"Thanks, pardner, I'll get the next one."

Jones bugged his eyes at the Gorbugast Kid. "Nobody was hurt!" he exclaimed almost hysterically. "They were shooting at point-blank range and nobody was hurt!"

"O' course not," said the ancient calmly. "Slim an' Shorty are old pals." He shrugged. "Kind o' a funny human custom, that. It don't make much sense that every man should shoot at every other man at least once a month. But we just took it over along with the rest. Maybe it makes men braver, huh?"

"Uh-huh," said Jones.

Other Hokas drifted over to talk to the Earthling. Opinion seemed to

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be about equally divided over whether Jones wasn't a human at all or whether humankind simply wasn't what the old stories had cracked it up to be. But in spite of their disappointment, they bore the man no ill will and stood him drinks. Jones accepted, thirstily. Drunkenness seemed the only sanity left in a world gone batty.

It might have been an hour later, or two hours or ten, that Slick came into the saloon. His voice rose over the hubbub: "Our scouts just brought me word. The Injuns ain't more'n ten kilometers away an' comin' fast. We'll have to get a move on."

The cowboys swallowed their drinks, smashed their glasses, and filed out the door. There were tears in the Gorbugast Kid's old eyes. "Goodbye, Pizen's," he said. "The Injuns'll burn yo' an' yo'll be gone — but I'll remember Pizen's. I'll remember Canyon Gulch."

Slick touched Jones' arm as the spaceman wandered aimlessly out the door. "We're short o' cowhands an' we got to move a big herd," he said. "Get a *gentle* pony an' go help."

"Okay," said Jones vaguely. It would be good to know he was doing something, however small. He might still have some hope of being defeated for re-election.

Somebody gave him a docile pony. He groped for the stirrup. Damn, it wasn't there. "Come here, shtirrup," he said sharply. "Come here this instant!"

"Here's the stirrup." A Hoka who flickered around the edges helped his foot into it. "By Pecos Bill, yo're drunk as a skunk!"

"No," said Jones solemnly, wavering into the saddle. "I am shober. Its all Toka whish ish drunk. So only drunksh on Toka are shober. That's right. Only shober men on Toka ish the drunks—"

His pony floated through a pink mist toward some or other direction. "I'm a lone cowboy!" sang Jones. "I'm the loneliest lone cowboy in these hyar parts."

He grew amorphously aware of the herd. The animals were nervous, they rolled their eyes and lowed and pawed the ground. Hoka cowhands rode around them, swearing, trying to get the beasts going in the right direction.

"I'm an old cowhand!" bawled Jones.

"Not so loud," snapped a Tex-Hoka. "These critters are spooky enough as it is."

"You wanna get 'em goin', don't you?" mumbled Jones. "We gotta get going. The greenskins are coming. Simple to get going. Like this."

He still carried his six-shooter. He pulled it out, fired into the air, and let out the loudest screech he had in him. "Yahoo!"

"Yo' crazy fool!"

"Yahoo!" Jones plunged toward the herd, shooting and shouting. "Ride 'em cowboy! Git along, little dogies! Yippee!"

The herd, of course, stampeded.

Like a red tide, it suddenly broke through the thin Hoka line. The cowboys scattered, there was death

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in those thousands of hoofs, the universe was filled with a roar of trampling and rushing and bellowing. The ground shook!

"Yahoo!" caroled Alexander Jones. He rode behind the herd, still shooting. "Git along, git along! Hi-yo, Sliver!"

"Oh, my God," groaned Slick. "Oh, my God! The crazy fool's got them stampeded *straight toward the Injuns—*"

"After 'em!" bawled a Hopalong-Hoka. "We may still be able to turn the herd! We cain't let the Injuns get it!"

"An' there'll be Jones to string up," said a Lone Rider-Hoka bleakly. "I'll bet he's a Injun spy planted to do this very job."

The cowboys spurred their mounts. A Hoka head couldn't hold two thoughts at once. If they were trying to swerve the stampede, the fact that they were riding straight into the enemy didn't occur to them.

"Whoopee-ti-yi-yo-o-o-o!" cried Jones, somewhere in the hurricane of dust.

With the curious time-sense of intoxication, he seemed almost at once to be bursting over a long, low hill. And beyond were the Slissii.

The reptiles went afoot, not being built for pony riding—but they could outrun a Hoka mount. Their army was a great compact mass, tightly disciplined by the thudding war-drums that signalled orders. They went naked, save for war paint and feathers such as primitives throughout the Galaxy wear, but they were armed with guns as well as lances, bows, and axes. There were at least as many of them as there had been Hokas in Canyon Gulch— but now only a hundred cowboys, perhaps, were left, riding full tilt against them.

Jones saw none of that. Being behind the herd, he didn't see it crash into the Injun army.

Nobody really did. The catastrophe was just too big.

When the Hokas arrived on the scene, the Injuns—such of them as had not simply been mashed flat—were scattered over the whole prairie. Slick wondered if they would ever stop running.

"At 'em, boys!" he yelled. "Go mop 'em up!"

The Hoka band galloped down on the enemy. A few small Injun groups sounded their war-hisses and tried to rally for a stand, but it was too late, they were too demoralized, the Hokas cut them down. Others were chased as they fled, lassoed and picked off by wildly cheering teddy bears.

Tex rode up to Slick. Dragging behind his pony at the end of a lasso was a huge Injun still struggling and hissing. "I think I got their chief, Slick," he said.

The town gambler nodded happily. "I know, that's a chief's paint. Swell! With him for a hostage, we can make the other Injuns talk turkey. An' we done cleaned them out of this hyar territory."

They rode over to Jones, along with the other Hokas, and the old utter awe turned in their eyes. "*He*

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did it!" whispered Monty. "All the time he was playin' dumb, he knew a way to wipe out the Injuns. Singlehanded! We should'a known better'n to go mistrustin' o' a — *human!*"

Jones swayed in the saddle. Suddenly he was violently sick. And he began to realize that he had caused a stampede, lost the whole herd, forever lost Hoka faith in his race— if the natives hung him, he thought grayly, it was only what he deserved.

"Yo' saved us," said Slick. He reached out and took the sheriff's badge off Jones' tunic. Solemnly, he handed over his Derringer and playing cards. "Yo' saved us all. So as long as yo' are here, Alexanderjones, yo' are the new town gambler o' Canyon Gulch."

Jones blinked. He grew aware of adoring furry faces— beyond them a trampled field of ruin . . . why, why— the Injuns were—smashed!

Now he could get to the *Draco*. And with its help and leadership, the Hokas could easily win a permanent victory over their ancient foes. And Ensign Alexander Braithwaite Jones would be a hero, and promoted.

"Saved you?" he muttered. His tongue still wasn't under very good control. "Oh . . . oh, yes, so I did, didn't I? Nice of me— but then I'm only human—" He groaned. "And I'm walking back to town. I won't be able to sit down for a week as it is!"

And the savior of Canyon Gulch, dismounting, missed the stirrup and fell flat on his face.

"Y'know," said someone thoughtfully, "maybe *that's* the way humans get on an' off. Maybe we should all—"

THE END

BOOK REVIEWS

(*continued from page 37*)

lease to industry at a pretty figure. His brush with the inexplicable power failures (and their even more completely impossible cure by Grandpa Schneider) challenges him to the utmost, and makes a new man of him in every respect.

Archie Fraser, the long-suffering hero of MAGIC, INC., is up against straight magic with all the trimmings. He lives in a world roughly like our own except that magic is recognized, understood, and used according to its own laws, as the physical sciences are in our time and/or place. Racketeers move in, and Archie and his friend Joe Jedson resist. Before they are through they have had to enlist the aid of a wonderfully versatile old witch, Amanda Todd Jennings, and her colleague Dr. Royce Worthington, anthropologist and witch smeller from the Lower Congo ("Man-Who-Asks-Inconvenient Questions" is his native name), who in turn has the assistance of his grandfather's mummified head. They have sat in on a typical legislative session and gone to Hell. Even the most hidebound anti-fantasy reader can hardly fail to enjoy the way in which magic is treated as consistently as any science, with no holds barred.

With such *hexerei* as Leiber and Heinlein practicing, make mine magic!

P. Schuyler Miller

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Illustration by Bill Terry

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LITTLE MISS MARTIAN

By E. Everett Evans

Remember Barbara Greenwood, the lovable "Little Miss Ignorance?" She's with us again, confronted by the problem of operating the ancient Martian machines.

"YOU kids did a grand job while I was gone," John Storer's eyes shone as James and Barbara Foxe completed their reports, but his voice became worried and his eyes cloudy as he continued. "Now I've got a job for you . . . but you can make it a sort of honey-moon, too."

"What's a 'honey-moon,' Jimmy?" Barbara Greenwood Foxe turned perplexed eyes toward her newly-acquired husband.

"That's my Little Miss Ignorance who said that!" Foxe exclaimed in tones of mock awe.

But his mind flashed back to the timid girl-figure he'd seen disembarking from the ship from Terra, had made his secretary and then learned, with astonishment, that she knew nothing of the commonest things of life. The Terran school that had trained her hadn't bothered to mention such things as music, or fiction, or dancing . . . or kisses. Yet this same demure typist had proved that she had the finest mind on Mars—perhaps in the Solar System. Foxe's thoughts grew grim as he remembered her attempt at suicide, barely prevented, because she had not known that all the "people" on Mars were android robots the same as herself. She'd thought Foxe was human — and that he thought her human, too, when he asked her to marry him.

He hugged her now as he quickly explained the idea of a honey-moon, then turned back to the Construction Engineer.

"What's the job, Chief?"

"That Danaris Bridge job. I want to check into it," the worried look was deeper now. "Wheaton's slipping badly lately; seems to have deteriorated some way."

"Why, I thought he was one of your best Superintendents?"

"He was, but he's getting farther and farther behind schedule. Study the situation, and report. At the same time you, and especially Barbara, can really have yourselves a time. In one of the old ruins at Charabis, just north of the bridge-site, the gang found some old Martian machines of some sort, and are quietly going nuts in their spare time, trying to figure them out."

"I'll take 'em both," Foxe's tone was unusually shrill, his eyes flashed.

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Barbara, however, looked on somewhat doubtfully, especially when Foxe added, "One'll get you five she does it."

But his superior, remembering the almost miraculous mental powers of this shy little typist, shook his head. "I'm no sucker. Now skedaddle!"

As they went out Barbara looked up at her big husband. "What's a 'sucker,' Jimmy?"

He shook his head helplessly, but grinned down at her. "I am, Honey."

"Then suckers are nice. But why are you and Mr. Storer so excited about finding some old machines?"

"No one has ever been able to figure out the least thing about the Martians or their technologies, which are so different from ours. We don't even know what sort of beings they were—or whether they were really natives here or visitors from some other planet who stayed here a short or a long time."

"Haven't they ever found any pictures of them?" she was becoming interested now.

"No pictures, no statues, no artifacts of any kind, such as dishes, tools, clothing, books, tables, chairs or beds. We can only deduce they were not very tall because all the entrances into their buildings are not over one meter high. Even their buildings have nothing in common with Terran construction save that they have walls, floors and roofs."

"No wonder you're excited," her own eyes now sparkled with interest. "I'll love trying to solve those problems with you."

AS the two figures ducked through the low doorway into the room where they had been directed, Foxe and his wife found themselves confronted by eight or nine metal fabrications of varying shapes and sizes —the supposedly Martian machines.

But even at first glance they could see that something was *wrong* about them; something deformed; something almost . . . *obscene!*

Red, iron-rust sand had been swept into piles about the walls of the huge room with its high ceiling, stone walls and stone floor. Even the angles and curves of these were oddly distorted to eyes accustomed to Terran construction.

Four figures were studying one of the Martian relics at the moment, in the light of several arc-lights the technicians had rigged up. Foxe and Barbara hurried to join them.

Foxe noticed that Barbara instantly became oblivious to everything but this new and enigmatic puzzle. He was amazed to see how she, who usually kept herself in the background, now gradually worked herself into the forefront of the group, even slightly shouldering aside one of them who was directly in front of some aspect of the machine she especially wished to scrutinize.

But the Technie, angered at her intrusion, roughly pushed her back. "This is no place for a girl," his rasping voice grated on Foxe's nerves. "Go play with your dolls!"

Barbara, suddenly brought to a re-

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alization of her forwardness, quickly dropped back, her face aflame, with a timorous "I beg your pardon; I'm sorry I jostled you." Then she turned puzzled eyes up to her husband. "What's a 'doll,' Jimmy?"

"Never mind that now, Darling," he patted her shoulder. Then he grabbed the offending one by the arm and whirled him about. "Mind your manner, Wheaton! That's Barbara Greenwood — Barbara Greenwood Foxe—you're pushing around."

"Never heard of her," the other began a cutting reply, but was unceremoniously pushed into the background by the other three, who rushed up to surround Barbara, their eyes and mouths big "O's" of astonishment. "The one who fixed the big electronic calculator?"

Foxe nodded with a smile of pride, and they began to ply her with innumerable questions, their attitudes showing all the marks of the deep respect they felt for her marvelous accomplishment.

Wheaton stood sourly on the edge of the group for a few minutes, then turned to leave, sullenness in his drooping shoulders.

It was an hour before Barbara could get away from the admiring group, and begin a more thorough study of the artifacts before her, unmolested now. Carefully, she and Foxe examined the exteriors of each of those believed-to-be machines.

There was so distinctly an alien air to the creations that he, at least, several times felt himself shuddering inwardly. There was nothing whatever familiar about them. He could see few moving parts, and none of them wheels, cams, cogs or slides. An occasional piston-like affair was the only thing even vaguely like the usual parts so commonly found on Terran machines. Mostly they were completely enclosed, if in fact there was anything in addition to the peculiarly-shaped outer structures.

Familiar as he was with Terran lathes, cutters, drills, shapers and such, he looked in vain for anything that might by any stretch of the imagination be used for those purposes. Nor did they seem to be generators or engines or motors. In fact, he grinned ruefully at his ignorance, they just didn't make sense at all. Yet he knew that they must have had a purpose, and he could see that they were marvels of mechanical construction — beautiful jobs of finely machined and turned parts expertly fitted together for whatever function it was that those utterly non-understandable Martians had made them to perform.

Finally, knowing that he, at least, would never be able to unravel their secrets, he began looking more closely at the building; itself. Construction he did understand.

This one was made of stone, as were many of the other ruins he'd seen about the planet. Yet nowhere had they found a quarry from which such stone came. Why, he wondered, had they made a machine shop, or factory, such a shape? It was a sort of squashed-down hemisphere, with a double-reverse curve horizon-

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tally in the walls. Making such a structure of stone certainly took a lot more skill than a cube-like one that would be far more efficient, he thought. If it had been constructed of that silvery-looking metal they often used, it would make more sense.

Shaking his head, he walked slowly away toward the bridge-construction office, after telling Barbara where he was going, and leaving her still pouring over those utterly strange mechanisms.

It was the third day of their stay at Charabis. Foxe had spent most of his time at the office, while Barbara stayed close to the Martian ruins.

Wheaton had remained barely civil the balance of the first day, but the second morning he broke into open rebellion.

"Look here, Foxe," he grated. "We all know you're Old Man Storer's pet, but I'm in charge here. You keep your damned nose out of my office and my records, or you'll get it pushed out!"

James Foxe was young in years of service, but he had been well-trained in the psychology of administration, and he kept his temper.

"Don't get upset, Lee," he said gently. "I'm not trying to take over your job or to make any trouble for you. Barbara and I are really up here on our honey-moon, but Mr. Storer asked me to look things over and see if I could make any suggestions for speeding up. You know there's a time-limit on this bridge, and that you're 'way behind schedule."

"Well, have your honey-moon, and get out of my office. And keep your wife away from those Martian machines. They're much too valuable as antiquities to let a mere typist meddle with them."

Training or not, Foxe was being hard put to hold in his temper, now that his beloved Bobby was being attacked. But he kept his voice low and level. "Whether you've heard about her before or not, Wheaton, she's proved herself to have one of the finest technical brains on Mars. Starting from scratch, without even knowing what an electronic calculator was, she learned its theory, found the trouble and fixed our big one back in Terramars in two weeks. You needn't be afraid she'll damage anything. And if you'd like a bet, I'll give you odds—big ones, too—she figures them out."

Wheaton scowled, but did not answer, and quickly turned away.

That night Foxe televised Storer. "I'm having trouble with Wheaton. He's surly; tries to keep me out of his office, and refuses to listen to suggestions. Also, he makes cracks about Bobby studying the Martian machines. Either he's become a no-good heel, or something's wrong with his mind. Haven't been able to figure out which, yet."

"Well, keep an eye on him. I'll send you an official 'take charge' letter tomorrow, but don't use it unless you have to. We'll need you back here soon. But try to get that bridge job back up to schedule—

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you know how important it is."

"Yes, I know about the rebate clause . . . hold it!"

But without waiting to disconnect he was out the door and racing across the sands. For, through the window he'd seen Wheaton talking to Barbara, and from the droop of her shoulders he could well deduce how she was reacting to the remarks the Senior Technician was undoubtedly making.

Foxe was still some distance from them when he saw Wheaton raise his fist and knew, undeniably, that he was about to strike Barbara.

But to Foxe's amazement that raised fist did not strike. It remained suspended in mid-air for several long seconds, then slowly sank. Barbara, he saw, was now standing upright and tense.

Before he could reach the two, Wheaton turned and started back toward the office. As they passed, Foxe saw that the Super's eyes were glazed and lifeless, that he was plodding along mechanically, woodenly.

Reaching Barbara, he examined her carefully to see if she'd been hurt. But slowly her tenseness left her and she sighed.

"What happened, Bobby?"

"He was very rough," she said simply. "He told me to stay away from the machines. Then he started to strike me . . . but he didn't, did he?"

"No, he didn't. But what did you do to make him stop?"

"Me?" she looked surprised. "I didn't do anything. I was so terrified I couldn't. I just kept thinking 'You leave me alone and go back to your office.' And after a minute he did."

Foxe felt himself go limp. "Hypnosis — or mental control of some kind." He shook his head, then smiled at her. "Is there anything that mind of yours can't do?"

Her eyes were wide. "Why, Jimmy, I don't know what you mean."

The next day Foxe was talking to some of the Technicians and workers at the bridge-head, working out new techniques for speeding up the work. Suddenly, in his mind, he heard Barbara's cry. "Jimmy, I'm getting it!"

Leaving everything — scarcely stopping to realize she'd communicated with him by telepathy, he raced toward Charabis. Barbara saw him coming and ran to meet him. Her dress was torn and dirty, her usually meticulous hair was mussed, and her face and hands were as soiled as they'd been that day she finally got the big calc fixed.

"I think I'm getting it, Jimmy, but I need some tools," she said. "Get me a set of half-to-two centimeter square wrenches, some calipers, a prize-bar and a very strong handlight. Later on I may need a lot of other things."

Foxe yelled at a passing workman and sent him scurrying for the needed tools. "What d'you think you've found, Darling?"

She gestured tiredly. "I don't know for sure. It's all so *different*. But I think I've figured out some-

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thing on one of the bigger machines I've been studying the past day and a half. I'm quite sure, now, that it's an energy-converter of some sort. I want to take off the outside plates to see what's inside."

The worker came up with the tools and the three quickly were hard at it, trying to remove those apparently bolted-on plates.

But success did not come easily. The plates were neither eroded nor rusted tight; it was merely that the Martian equivalent of nuts and bolts did not work like Earthly ones.

For hours they figured and toiled. They could see that the "nuts" had to come off to allow the "bolts" to come out so the plates could be lifted off. But the nuts would not turn.

Finally the Technie threw down a wrench in disgust. "Aw, let's burn 'em off!"

Barbara looked at him in surprise. "Why, Mr. Shaffer, you mustn't get discouraged so easily. Just think what a wonderful opportunity this is to learn new ways of doing things. This is a nut-and-bolt set-up that could never work loose with vibration, like ours often do. It's ever so much better than lock-washers. Once we learn this secret, we'll have added something really worthwhile to machine-building techniques."

The Technie looked at her for a moment, then he smiled. "By golly, you're a wonder. Guess I haven't enough patience. Which is probably why I couldn't fix a calc."

She smiled. "Let's try another angle. I've been wondering if perhaps they used some sort of magnetic treatment to fix the nuts after they're in place. Have we anything here that could demagnetize them?"

His eyes opened wider. "Not here, but back at camp we have. I'll go get it," and he ran off.

While he was gone Barbara slowly circled the huge machine. Suddenly she stopped and kneeled in the dust to examine more closely something on the other side. Quickly Foxe ran around to her. "What've you found now, Kitten?"

Instead of answering directly, she looked up with the puzzle-look again in her eyes. "What's a 'kitten,' Jimmy?"

He groaned, then smiled. "A kitten is a small, furred, cuddly animal back on Terra that people make pets of."

"This piece here," she touched a sort of piston with her finger. "I think when power is connected up that this is the control." She pulled from her pocket a piece of red chalk, and after consulting her note-book, marked a number on it, then made a notation in the book.

"I haven't seen any wires or cables anywhere," Foxe said thoughtfully. "How do you suppose they transmit power?"

She pulled at her lower lip in an unconscious gesture of concentration. "I don't know, but I think it must have been broadcast in some way."

Foxe looked up in surprise.

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"Broadcast? But how? We've never been able to do that."

"I don't know . . . yet," her eyes were still examining the machine and her words came slowly. "I haven't been able to find any engine or transformer or generator of any sort. That's why I think it was broadcast, perhaps from a long distance from some central power-source. Or perhaps the power is inherent in each machine, hidden away somewhere inside."

Shaffer arrived at that moment with the de-magnetizer . . . but Wheaton was with him.

"I hear you're trying to take these machines apart. I absolutely forbid any further meddling with them!"

Foxe glanced up sharply. "Barbara knows what she's doing. And anyway, your authority doesn't cover this. You're only in charge of the bridge-building, and I suggest you get at it—you're getting further behind schedule every day."

The other's face darkened. "I'm in charge here."

Foxe started toward him, but Barbara quickly stepped between them.

"I don't know just why you dislike me so, Mr. Wheaton," she said, "but I can assure you I will not harm these wonderful machines in any way. I know I should have kept in closer contact with you about them, but you're so busy I hated to disturb you."

She turned on the full power of her smile—and perhaps a touch of that mental-control power as well—and slowly the man's anger seemed to evaporate somewhat. "Maybe I spoke too hastily," he mumbled. "But I still don't think you should go ahead."

Foxe was still angry. "Well, I do, and she'll do what she wants."

They connected up the de-magnetizer, and carefully she applied it to the bolt-and-nut on which they had been working so long. Closely she watched the meter on the mechanism, and when she felt sufficient power had been applied, cut it off and again used the wrench. The nut would not turn. She gave it another shot of juice then tried again. This time it barely moved . . . but it did turn! Another application, and another, and finally the nut came off freely.

"Say, that's a sweet system," Shaffer said admiringly. "Funny no one on Terra ever thought of it."

Barbara made no reply as she was busy de-magnetizing each of the others in turn, while Foxe followed her with the wrench. In moments all the bolts were removed, and the three lifted off the heavy plate and set it carefully to one side.

The extension light in her hand, Barbara was soon half-inside the machine, studying its complex interior carefully, the others kneeling beside her. Foxe shivered at the weird, alien sight. There were wires here, of varying sizes, and wound in loops and convolutions that looked like a madman's hook-up . . . or a skein of yarn after a baby has played with it. There were a dozen or so electronic tubes—they could be nothing

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else, although they looked like nothing any of these experts had ever seen.

But the center piece, which caught and held the eyes, was a helical machining of burnished metal, whose twistings and turnings made their eyes hurt in trying to follow its convolutions. It was as though it wandered off into some impossible other dimension.

"Good God!" Foxe breathed.

Barbara's eyes, he noted, were squinted in concentration, yet each couple of seconds she would close them tightly for a moment before taking another look.

Wheaton, who had been standing sullenly in the background, now sidled forward to look, and Foxe noticed that his gaze soon changed to the stare of one in a hypnotic trance. His eyes were so patently trying to follow those impossible wave-forms that Terran minds were not equipped to interpret. Foxe felt the first faint twinges of uneasiness as he watched Wheaton's face. He started to shake him to snap him out of it when Wheaton suddenly wheeled and grabbed up a sledge. With a quick swing he smashed it against the Martian machine.

Luckily, the metal of which the Martian mechanism was built was too strong, and no damage was done by Wheaton's sudden attack.

Both Foxe and Shaffer yelled and started toward him, but Barbara rose and intercepted them. She fixed her gaze on Wheaton, and the intensity of her concentration was shown by the rigidity of her face and body.

Wheaton was raising the sledge for another smash at the machine, his face livid. But his arms began to falter. Slower and slower they moved, then halted, and after a moment of apparent indecision he dropped the sledge, his body trembling.

As Barbara relaxed, Wheaton suddenly turned and ran toward the exit.

Foxe started to say something, but was interrupted by a warning shout from Shaffer. *"Duck, Wheaton! The door!"*

But the racing figure did not hear or heed the warning, did not seem to remember the lowness of the doorway. At full tilt, still erect, he crashed into the stone wall. His head and shoulders struck that sturdy wall while his legs and feet tried to continue on through the doorway. His broken body fell backward onto the floor of the room . . . and was still.

Barbara and Shaffer were not far behind Foxe in reaching the fallen figure, and Barbara sobbed in horror at sight of that battered and broken head.

Quickly Foxe knelt and made swift examination, then raised his head toward them, his eyes dimmed. "He's dead."

Barbara looked at him uncertainly. "What's 'dead,' Jimmy?"

"Not living," he answered absently. He motioned to Shaffer.

"Take the body out. I'll have to get in touch with Storer and have

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him send another Super for the bridge job."

Barbara had been making a more careful examination of that pitiful, broken body. "Wait, Jimmy," she lifted her hand. "I think I can fix him up again."

"What?" Surprise made both men swivel toward her, eyes wide. "I know you're good, Darling," Foxe said, "but what makes you think you can bring him back to life?"

"When I was studying for and repairing that calculator," she explained, "I learned a lot about robotic brains, too. This one is badly damaged, but I don't believe it is irreparably so."

"Well," his breath suspirated out quickly. "If you can spell 'able,' hop to it." He turned back to Shaffer. "Take him to the shop lab, then, where she'll have the necessary tools."

And as Shaffer dragged the body out and set off across the sands with it over his shoulder, Foxe turned to comfort Barbara. But found, to his surprise, that she was standing straight, unafraid, and with a look resembling eagerness in her eyes.

NOT needing sleep, although it had been found usually better if android robots did get some rest each day, Barbara worked on through that night.

When Foxe came in the next morning she had disconnected the iridium-sponge brain from the wire-nerves and muscle-ganglia, and removed it from the broken head-case. Now, with magnifying spectacles and small forceps, she was studying its every convolution and the almost-infinite connectors of communication.

"Jimmie, get this list of books for me from the library at Terramars," she barely returned his kiss. "I've got an idea, but need more technological information."

Foxe silently regarded her, fondly, careful not to disturb her train of thought. He knew her well enough now not to do so, when she had that look on her face.

Softly he tip-toed away and televised Storer. "She's going to do it again, Chief," he chuckled proudly. "I'll bet Wheaton's brain will be better than ever when she gets through with it."

"I hope so" the Engineer's voice was dispirited, worried.

"What's wrong now, Chief?" Foxe asked.

"Everything. Just got confidential word from Terra that the minority political party there is making a great to-do about the expense and time it is taking to fix up Mars for colonization, and saying this proves Men were not intended to live here. They're campaigning to have all work stopped and all robots destroyed."

"Whew!" Foxe whistled. "That means our only chance is to get things here finished much more quickly and cheaply than originally planned, before they have time to put across their idea."

"You know how much chance there

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is of doing that."

"We'll do it some way," confidently.

"You hope," Storer grunted as he disconnected.

It was near midnight when Foxe had a chance to go see Barbara at the laboratory. She was sitting on the edge of a table, deeply engrossed in one of the books a swift jet-rocket had brought. She was slowly turning the pages, but Foxe knew that, with her special abilities, she was reading it page-at-a-glance, and that her eidetic memory was retaining every concept.

"Hello, Jimmy," she slid into his arms. "I've found that Wheaton's deterioration was due to faulty connections. Also, I've worked out a few new twists and incorporated them into his brain. I'm ready to revive him now—was just waiting for you to help."

Foxe glanced at Wheaton's body, lying on the table, looking exactly like a man asleep.

"What do I do?"

She picked up two electrodes, connected by wires to a generator through a peculiarly-shaped little box-like object. These electrodes she fastened, one to the forehead and the other to the base of the skull. When adjusted to suit her, she stepped over to the peculiar box-like object.

"Throw that big switch," she commanded, and Foxe did so. Carefully she then advanced a lever on the little box. Slowly but steadily she pushed it toward the opposite end of the slot through which it moved.

A tense moment, then the figure on the table stirred, moved, finally sat up. The eyes opened slowly, and a strange perturbed look came into Wheaton's face.

He raised an exploratory hand, and felt the electrodes. But before he could remove them, Barbara sprang forward and pulled his hands down.

"Wait, now, Mr. Wheaton," she cautioned. "Let me take them off."

"Who . . . what . . . ?" He seemed very perplexed, as though he should know . . . or remember . . . something—but couldn't.

"Just take it easy," Foxe counselled. "You were injured, but Barbara fixed you up."

"Oh, I remember now," he shuddered. "That spiral . . . I tried to follow it . . ."

"Yes," Barbara made sympathetic little clucking noises. "Then you started to run, and banged into the wall, knocking yourself out, so we brought you here and revived you." She had by now removed the electrodes. "How do you feel?"

"Why, I feel wonderful!"

Foxe had been sub-consciously noticing something, and now it came to him what it was. Wheaton's voice was a bit lower, and more . . . more masterful. He seemed like a different person, in a subtle way. Now he got down from the table, and flexed his muscles, his body straightening and his posture more erect and dominant than it had been before.

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"My mind seems clearer, somehow," he turned a puzzled glance toward the two who were watching him so closely. "Why is that?"

Without answering directly, Barbara picked up one of the text-books on electronics, opened it and handed it to him.

"Read that page."

Wheaton, puzzled, nevertheless took the book and glanced at it. Before he had had time to more than look at it, she jerked it from his hand. "Repeat what you read," she commanded.

In a sing-song voice he started reeling off technical jargon and complex equations. Foxe looked and listened in amazement, while Barbara's face lighted with joy.

"I did it, Jimmie! I did it!" she whirled around and around the laboratory, her blue-black curls dancing in the way he loved so much.

Wheaton looked on in surprise. "I couldn't do that before! May I ask just what it was you did to me?" His voice was so plaintive the other two had to stop and laugh.

"Your brain was badly damaged," Barbara explained. "So, before I repaired it, I got the latest books and studied quite a bit about brain construction, then added a few things I worked out from my knowledge of electronics. I added a lot of new channels, and installed a more complex system of memory and intercommunicating lines. I think you'll find," she added, "that you have quite a bit more mental ability now than before."

Wheaton took that startling announcement in stride, then concentrated, as though examining his mind. For long moments he stood there, alternately frowning as he studied, and smiling as he seemed to find answers. Finally he straightened, and then came over and took her hand.

"Thank you Mrs. Foxe," he said, "I really believe you are right. I seem able to think much better. If it proves out, I'm in debt to you. And, considering the way I've acted, your action was as splendid as it was undeserved by me."

As Wheaton walked out of the laboratory Foxe said fondly, "My Little Miss Martian did it again."

"Oh, you've got a new name for me," she looked surprised.

"Mr. Storer really gave it to you," he explained. "He said you were the finest thing on Mars . . . and I heartily agree!"

With the new habit she'd recently acquired, Barbara went back to the previous subject as though there'd been no interruption. "Now that I know I can improve brains, I'm going to do the same thing for you," she said determinedly. "Lie down on that table."

"Right now?" surprisedly.

"*Right now!*" emphatically.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, little boy fashion. Nor was there any fear or hesitation in him. If his Barbara felt she could do it, that was good enough for him.

A week passed. Foxe shuttled between the Main office on Terra-

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mars, and the Bridge office and Charabis, where he and Wheaton now worked in close harmony. They were beginning to catch up, yet still there were many annoying delays and bad breaks.

Their new minds worked far more swiftly and efficiently than before, but neither one was any match for Barbara's intuitive and inherent genius. They had neither her flashing brilliance, nor her patience and capacity for taking infinite pains, which is but another facet of a great mind.

Barbara met him at the landing field this day, and even before he landed her mind was talking to his.

"I've good news, Jimmy!" He could feel her happiness, her eagerness. Through the port he could see her little feet fairly dancing on the red sands, and her eyes were almost emitting sparks of excitement as he alighted and ran to her.

"I can use some," his voice was tired, dispirited. "We're getting farther behind every day . . . and those politicians on Terra are getting stronger and more insistent."

Her wordless sympathy reached out and erased much of the care and worry from his mind, as she hurried him to Charabis. Arriving at the machine-building they ducked through the low doorway and she started leading him towards a distant corner. He was surprised that she was not taking him to the big machine she had been studying so intensively.

"We almost missed it," she was chattering away. "Someone had swept a pile of sand onto it, and it was only good luck that made me uncover it one day. There!" she pointed dramatically. "That's the power plant. And I know how to run it!"

It was such a little thing he was speechless. It was like nothing he'd ever seen; there wasn't, seemingly, a single straight line or recognizable angle or curve to it. It made him slightly dizzy just to look at it intently. Remembering seeing her do it, he began closing his eyes tightly every couple of seconds, lest he become hypnotized by those alien lines.

"Look here, Jimmy," she was squatting beside it, and he sank onto his heels to peer at what she was pointing out. "See this sort of funnel-like opening? When I started trying to clean it out, I saw there were a few grains of sand that were not like ordinary red Martian rust-dust, so I carefully separated them and analyzed them. They are sand, all right, but a silicon-based sand."

Foxe's new mind leaped at the conclusion. "An energy-converter?"

"That's right!" she exulted. "They achieve the total disintegration of matter."

"Good Lord, what power!"

"It's unlimited, to all intents and purposes. They have an entirely different system of technology than ours for using it, too. I haven't learned all the principles behind it . . . . yet, but I can use it. Shall I start it up?"

He looked at her doubtfully. "You're sure it'll be all X if you do?

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No danger?"

"Silly boy," she laughed. "We've had it running every day."

Nevertheless, Foxe couldn't help taking a deep breath as she manipulated what he supposed was a-switch—though it certainly didn't look like any he'd ever seen before. There was no flash, no squeal, no hum. Nothing seemed to move. Yet there came a sur-charge of feeling of intensity of everything about him; even the very air, that made him aware the strange generator was working.

Barbara gave a signal to one of the Technies, and the arc-lights went out. A moment of blackness, then Foxe was aware of a growing light in the room. A clear, clean monochromatic light that was omni-present. There were no shadows, he noticed, and realized that the entire room was lighted from all angles. Yet he could see no source of the strange illumination.

Barbara was watching his expression with delight. "Isn't it wonderful? It's cold light, too!"

He shook his head slowly, unbelievingly. "It just can't be . . . but it is," he said slowly, awe in his tones. "How do they get the power?"

"It's broadcast, like we thought," she explained. "That little generator gives almost unlimited power, and we can broadcast it almost any planetary distance. You can use it for the Monorail, and for light and power for cities, farms, factories, homes—everything."

She tugged at his hand. "Now come and see what else we've worked out."

They went over to another of the medium-sized machines. It had a broad flat surface which Barbara and the Technies had polished and scoured until it shone like a mirror. She laid an iron wrench on it.

"Watch this now," she commanded, and reached down to carefully adjust that piston-like control he'd noticed before. Foxe felt again the same surcharged feeling in the very air, as of immense and intensely powerful energy pervading the room, and seeming to swirl about the machine.

Slowly at first, then with increasing speed as she evidently applied more power, the wrench raised itself from the polished surface, until it hung suspended a couple of meters above the machine. For moments it hung there, then she increased the power and it shot up to clang against the ceiling, and cling there.

"If I gave it enough mover it would burst through that stone," she said. She cut off the power, and the wrench fell.

"Anti-gravity," he breathed in awe. "The dream of scientists come true."

"Yes," she exulted, "and we've figured out how to make a portable machine of it. It's almost finished over in the shop. By tomorrow it will be done."

His mind was working with unusual rapidity. "Portable? Do you mean we can move heavy beams and trusses with it?"

"Sure," she said delightedly. "A

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couple of men can carry almost anything, with a portable attached to it."

"Then we've got this thing licked!" he yelled, and he picked her up and danced her about, and kissed her resoundingly. "They can't stop us now. And when we send specifications of these back to Terra your contributions to science will force those politicians to shut up!"

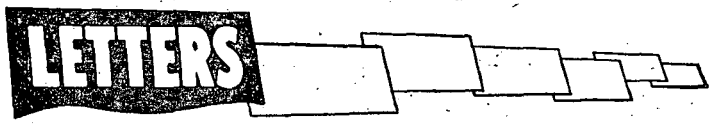
"This will make Mr. Storer very happy, won't it, Jimmy?" she asked when he finally set her down.

"Happy?" Foxe chuckled. "He'll sing like a bird!"

That perplexed-look came back into Barbara's eyes. "What's a 'bird,' Jimmie?"

"Dear Little Miss Martian," he fondled her satiny-soft cheek with his hand. "You just keep on figuring out simple little things like anti-gravity and cold light and such ancient alien technologies, and let complex matters like 'what's a bird' take care of themselves!"

THE END



Joe Gibson

'Ray Palmer *c/o* Other Worlds' is virtually true, ya know—you are on another world. I won't add "when the ice goes out" because I've heard some of those Wisconsin ponds never see ice! Gad . . . to be guzzling cold beer while someone else does the fishing!

But the purpose of this epistle is that if I were the January OW I'd ring like a bell! First place, that Settles cover harks straight back to fondest reminiscences of Hugo Gernsback. Those were the days, you recall, when they were trying to sell science-fiction. It wasn't 'til later that they started worrying about selling the magazines and started using the guy-girl-bem cover trio to attract reader-interest. If stf wouldn't sell, not even that trio could've saved it, so the earlier mags concerned themselves solely with selling science-fiction. And today, it sells so well we don't really need that trio!

(*Whereupon Rap gives me a blank stare, turns, and wades out a little further in his hip-boots. The steel fishpole shrieks as he whips it thru the air, testing the flexibility . . .*)

Anyway, we started out with stf covers and then, for a while, we had to buck the competition of other, more generally popular fields of fiction. It was a time when presidents talked about "status quo" and anybody who wasn't pitching his commercials the same way everybody else did couldn't sell his product—and, in the publishing field, that meant using sex on the covers. It still does, to some extent. Fads die slowly.

(*Rap adjusts his tackle, easing the line off the spool. "You better keep clear!" he warned. "I got me a psycho-kinetic fly here." He swings back . . .*)

The same can't be said for the stories inside, though. I mean, we're not going back to the early style. More often than not, they were more science than fiction, or all science and

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cripes, this is a story? Of course, it's still highly imaginative, but today I believe it's being written for more people. In those early days, there were only a relative few of us who appreciated science-fiction; we just had the aptitudes that it would appeal to, the way it was written. Today, it's written a hundred different ways, some we like, some we don't like—but that other people *do* like!

(. . . *And casts! The reel whines. "They'll chase you right up on the bank when they get a load of this fly!" Rap boasts calmly. "It just ain't fair to the fish!"*)

Actually I was ready for a disappointment when I saw that Settles cover. When I felt the old tingle of excitement, the way stf used to hit *me*—guess we're all that way, about that age—I was all ready to be disgusted when I read the story that cover illustrated. After so much experience, you just *know* the story isn't going to measure up to the cover.

(*"Fact is," drawls Rap, "this fly's outlawed in most states!" He eased the hook gently out of a fat, speckled trout. "Only trouble is, it wears you out just pulling 'em in"*)

And then, it didn't!

(*Rap looks stunned.*)

It didn't disappoint me. It measured up to the cover. Steber's yarn was—well, it was darned good. It was—well, I was a high-school kid delivering newspapers and building model airplanes again, and stf was great.

But I don't know. Maybe it was just prejudice on my part. I've met the main characters of Steber's yarn. That can make a difference. Like going to see a hit Broadway play, only you don't feel so well that evening, so the show's a flop far as you're concerned—but just go see an amateur production in a summer-stock converted barn and, just because you know that cute actress who walked across the stage in Act II, it's the greatest entertainment you've seen in years!

That Settles cover gives me an idea, though. Probably isn't commercially sound but—well, suppose there was no lettering on the cover? Nothing, that is, except a very small strip at the bottom with the blurb: *See Inside Cover!* Inside, of course, would be the lettering—title, dateline, and price, etc. But with a striking stf cover outside, I wonder how many unsuspecting people would break stride, do a double-take, stare, edge up to the news-stand, reach out hesitantly, lift it from the rack . . . and end up as a science-fiction reader? In the midst of all the other magazines a cover like that would be the neatest trick in years.

24 Kensington Avenue
Jersey City 4, N. J.

Well, Joe, the January cover and cover story must have really impressed you to rate such praise. Your letter didn't mention the rest of the issue but we hope you found the other stories equally pleasing. The cover for this issue may not be in the style you remember from "the good old days of stf," but we don't think you'll find any objections to the beautiful job that Hannes Bok has done.—Ed.

Jack Safarik

I'm sure glad to hear about your recovery; you probably wouldn't remember me but I sent you a letter at St. Francis. Just exactly what *was* the number of letters you received, anyway?

I hear you sold IMAGINATION to Bill Hamling. How come? Oh, well, just so it's still published. Glad to hear that you finally shed that Ste-

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Illustration by H. W. McCauley

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THE CITY

By Sydney J. Bounds

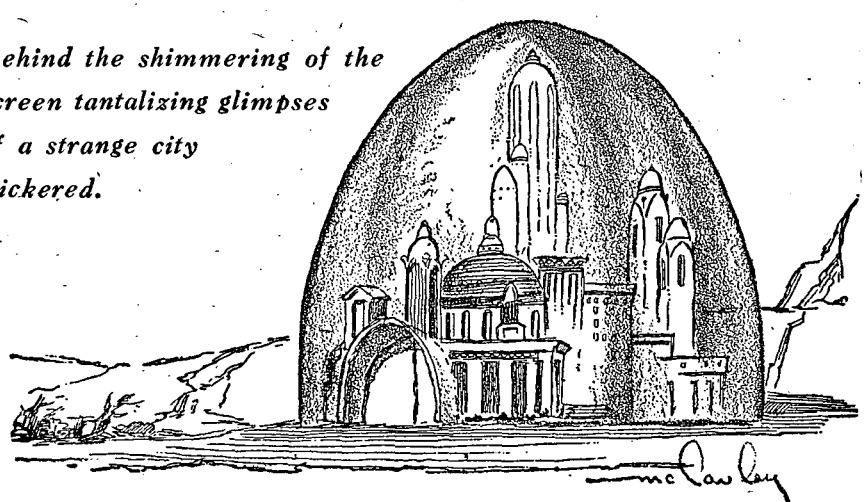
He came from a radioactive desert of death to Man's last stronghold on this sterile planet—The City—and aided by flaming-haired Thalia, discovered its long forgotten secret.

HE came out of the dust bowl, a tall, gaunt figure in rags, and stood before the energy screen. Behind the violet shimmering of the screen, tantalizing glimpses of a strange city flickered like images on a revolving disc.

He turned a moment, and stared back at the flat horizon. The endless dust stretched for empty miles, treeless and waterless, a desert of radioactive death. Here and there, small areas of radiation still festered, poisoning Earth's once-fertile soil.

He turned again to study the energy screen. Its brilliance dazzled him; the coruscations danced a symphony of colour, fascinating — and deadly. He walked forward, through the screen, and stood before the city.

It was like nothing he had seen before, a vast, translucent dome covering a structure of metal and plastic, impressive in its bulk, yet somehow disturbing. He looked at the city and wondered why he had come.



Behind the shimmering of the screen tantalizing glimpses of a strange city flickered.

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For days now, he had experienced the feeling of deep-set purpose, an inner urge which had driven him across the wilderness of dust, past ugly splotches of latent radioactivity, to the city behind the energy screen.

Suddenly, there were men behind the translucent dome, men in shiny uniforms and carrying weapons, men with incredulity written in their faces and fear frozen in their immobility. He stared at them, wondering.

There was a tense moment of indecision, then one of the men went off for orders. He waited outside the dome, his mouth practicing unaccustomed words. It had been a long time since he needed speech.

Presently the man who had gone for orders returned. He spoke briefly to the others. They didn't like it —they didn't like it at all—but they opened the outer door and he passed through into the airlock.

They kept him waiting while the sterilizers cleansed him of deadly radioactivity, then the inner door swung wide and he walked into the city. They didn't attempt to touch him—not even to search him for hidden weapons. Perhaps they were afraid of the gaunt figure who had come out of the dust bowl, where no man could live, afraid of the haggard man in rags who walked unharmed through the energy screen.

He was surrounded, covered by the bell-shaped mouths of a dozen blasters. A man with polished silver epaulettes gave an order.

"Prisoner, forward—march!"

He walked along the broad avenue leading to the heart of the city, aware that hidden eyes watched from a hundred windows. They reached an arched portal lettered COUNCIL HALL and he was taken inside. A corridor, floored with a mosaic of coloured tiles, led to a domed chamber. They marched him in and the man with silver epaulettes saluted the Council of Six.

"Prisoner for interrogation, Leader."

The Leader stared at him with bleak, steely eyes. He towered over the prisoner, a bulky man who gave the impression of being composed chiefly of granite. He was a powerful man, unafraid and ruthless; a man who claimed leadership by force and cunning.

"What is your name, prisoner?"

His voice was a deep growl, calculated to warn the prisoner he was not a man to be trifled with.

"My name —"

The haggard figure struggled with the words—it was so long since there had been anyone to listen. A name! Why did they want a name? What use did *he* have for a name?

His eyes moved past the Leader's head to a scroll on the tessellated wall:

HALL OF THE BRAIN

"What is your name?" repeated the Leader.

Why couldn't they leave him alone to think about it? He thought so slowly. He studied the inscription again. *Hall*—that made twice he had seen the word. Once outside, once

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ere. Perhaps it had significance for hese people.

"My name," he said firmly, "is Iall."

The Leader did not seem impres-ed. He growled again:

"And where do you come from?"

The gaunt man who had decided o call himself Hall thought of a lesert of radioactive dust. He hought of a cave beyond the hori-on and a small patch of grass where he creeping death had not yet en-roached—but it was no use telling hese people about that.

"I come from—outside," he said, vaving a brown hand vaguely.

A sharp hiss went round the ta-ole. The Council of Six stared in-redulously. Voices jumbled to-ether.

"That's impossible . . . the man's a liar! . . . a fool . . . kill him! . . . let the Brain decide."

"Silence!"

The Leader's voice thundered. Steely eyes quieted the uproar.

"It has been established that Hall came from outside the city," he said coldly. "He was seen to walk through the screen. Those are facts — we are here to consider them. Bysshe-Percy, in your opinion, could this man have forced an entry to the city?"

A thin, pale-faced man with tapered fingers rose.

"I don't see that it would be possible," he stated. "This man is obviously one of the mutants—through long exposure to radiation, he has become impervious to it. That was how he could walk through the energy screen unharmed—the cellular structure of his body has undoubtedly changed to offset the effects of radioactivity. But that does not give him the ability to pass through solid matter."

The Leader considered the point. He turned to Hall.

"Why were you sent here?"

Sent here . . . the words echoed meaninglessly inside his head. How could he have been *sent?* Beyond the city, life did not exist. There had been others, he remembered vaguely, but that was a long time ago. He tried to remember how long.

"Who sent you here?" demanded the Leader.

Hall looked around the circle of faces. How could he tell them there was no-one to send him? They wouldn't believe the truth—he could read that in their faces.

"I came—" he began, then stopped.

Why had he come? He searched his mind for the reason, but it eluded him. He gave up the struggle to find a reason.

"I just came," he said simply.

Bysshe-Percy was on his feet again, his slender white fingers drumming a tattoo on the polished table-top.

"It may be just a trick to gain entrance to the city. I say, kill him!"

Hall was puzzled. Why should anyone want to kill him? He began to wish he had not come to the city at all.

"This is the first prisoner we have

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taken," the Leader said. "We dare not kill him until we have extracted full details of the strength of the mutants, their weapons—and how they propose to attack the city."

Hall stared at the Leader. Why did they call him mutant? He was the same as they were—except that he could live through the deadly radiation covering the planet, and that was only a matter of adaptability. A fluke of nature.

There was a barrage of questions then. The Leader, Bysshe-Percy, and others of the Council of Six fired questions at him. The uniformed guards stood round him, blasters levelled. A man in a white coat was scribbling furiously, taking down questions and answers.

"Feed the data to the Brain."

A curtain moved back and Hall stared beyond to the gargantuan bulk of machinery standing in the alcove. He saw a labyrinth of wiring, glittering tubes that clicked insidiously, red lights winking on and off.

"Data prepared," said the man in the white coat.

"First question," said the Leader. "Is this man telling the truth?"

Relays clicked, lights flashed. A punched card emerged from the rejection slot.

"Second question. Explain your rejection of the last question."

The Brain clicked rapidly, sorting data, preparing an answer.

"This is no *man*."

"Third question. Is this *mutant* telling the truth?"

Again the delay while the Brain worked; again the mechanical clicking.

"So far as the data goes—yes."

"Fourth question. *Is the continued existence of this mutant a threat to the security of the city?*"

Hall detected anxiety in the faces of the men around him. He felt uneasy—why should these people fear him? And how could a lifeless machine answer such vital questions?

The Brain rejected the question.

"Fifth question. Explain your rejection of the last question."

The delay was longer this time. Bysshe-Percy drummed on the table. The Leader's face was grim; tiny beads of sweat on his massive forehead betrayed his feelings.

"The rejection was caused by data, outside of that supplied on the mutant, which made the question meaningless."

"Sixth question. What is this additional data?"

No answer.

"Seventh question. Explain your rejection of the last question."

No answer.

Hall saw fingers tighten on the triggers of a dozen blasters. The man with the silver epaulettes waited the command to fire.

The Leader raised his hand.

"Wait!" He addressed the Brain again. "Eighth question. Is this mutant a threat to the authority of the Council of Six?"

Relays clicked inside the machine. Hall was puzzled. How could these people consider him a threat? What possible danger could he be to them?

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The machine delivered the answer to the question.

"Yes!"

Bysshe-Percy stopped drumming the table.

"Kill him!" he said tersely.

The rest of the Council upheld his decision. Reluctantly, the Leader agreed. He nodded slightly to the man with the silver epaulettes.

Hall stared into the bell-shaped muzzles of the blasters. He waited for the word to fire—and, in that moment, the gaunt man who had come out of the dust bowl, the man who walked through the energy screen—*disappeared*. He was no longer in the Hall of the Brain.

II

The transition was instantaneous. He felt nothing—there was no moment of blackness. He was facing the Council of Six, waiting for death to claim him—then, he was in another place.

He was in a small room, tastefully decorated in blue and cream, smelling faintly of an exotic perfume. Fine silks draped the walls and the ornamentation was so obviously feminine that the machinery seemed out of place. There were three persons in the room, two men and one woman. Hall studied them.

The man in the corner, fussing with the machinery, was short and squat, with dark hair and a clipped moustache. The other man was dressed in gay, almost flamboyant clothes. The latter was a slim man with blond hair and holding a blaster, the muzzle of which pointed directly at Hall.

He half-turned to look at the woman lying across the damask and gold counterpane on the bed. Tall and slim, her exquisite form was scarcely concealed by a long gown of some gossamer-sheer material. Her skin was smooth alabaster, her hair the color of flame; her face was a delicate oval of beauty, with wide, violet eyes and lips tinged with carmine.

The gown dropped away below curving hips, revealing one slender limb, smooth and white. Her toenails were stained crimson. Her shoulders were bare, carved from alabaster, and her breasts were firm and proud. A large ruby glittered between her breasts, its clasp holding her dress in place.

Hall felt his throat constrict as he looked at her. His mouth was dry.

"You can relax here," she said, her voice singing like temple bells. "You are amongst friends."

"But don't try anything," warned the blond man in flamboyant clothes, gesturing with his blaster.

Hall was puzzled.

"You brought me here? How?"

She smiled, and nodded to the short man.

"Delmar brought you — he's our technical wizard. Tell him about it, Delmar."

Delmar brushed his moustache with a brown-stained finger. He talked quickly, in the manner of one used to a lecture-room.

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"The principle of teleportation is very simple. The object to be transported is focussed, by remote control, in a low-energy beam—this is used as a tracer. Then power is shunted onto the beam, the object is dematerialized and, in the form of energy waves, attracted to the opposite end of the beam. Here, the energy waves are transformed into the identical atomic pattern of the object transported."

Delmar went back to his machine, the lecture forgotten.

"What Delmar means," the woman laughed, watching the expression of complete bewilderment on Hall's gaunt face, "is that he took you to pieces in the Hall of the Brain, and put you back together, here, in this room."

"Incidentally, saving your life," said the man with the blaster.

That was something Hall could understand.

"Thank you," he said slowly.

Delmar looked up from the visiscreen he was watching.

"The uproar caused by Hall's sudden disappearance seems to have died down. The Brain can give no clue to the reason for his disappearance and the Council seem to have taken it for granted that he vanished of his own free will—rather lucky for us, that. The Leader has just given orders for a thorough search to be made throughout the city—Hall is to be killed on sight as a potential danger to the city."

The woman laughed.

"To the Council they mean — the Brain didn't say he was a danger to the city!"

"But he *could* be," objected the flamboyant man, still nursing his blaster.

"Oh, put that thing away, Botticelli—Hall is going to do as we tell him. Aren't you?"

She leaned towards him, her eyes smiling. The perfume of her flame-colored hair was stronger now — it excited him. His eyes looked hungrily at her.

"You see," she mumured, "he'll do anything for me . . . "

"You can't be sure of your hold over him," Botticelli said, still clutching the blaster. "Remember, the Brain said he was not a man."

She stood up, her violet eyes glistening.

"The Brain! I don't need a machine to tell *me* when I can sway a man . . . of course, he's a mutant —no-one else could live in that radioactive hell out there—but he still has the instincts of a man!"

Hall stood silent. There were so many things he could not understand —but this woman, he could understand *her*.

She turned to the short man over the visiscreen.

"You'd better dismantle your equipment and get it out of here, Delmar. If the Leader knows his business, he'll have detectors operating to trace spy rays — and we don't want him here till we've got rid of Hall."

Delmar started packing his machine.

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"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

She thought quickly.

"They can't search the whole city for at least thirty-six hours — that gives us plenty of time to act. As soon as the police have searched one area, we'll teleport Hall there — they won't search the same area twice."

Delmar nodded agreement. His equipment fitted compactly into two cases and, without another word, he picked them up and left the apartment.

"What are you going to do with him, Thalia?" Botticelli asked.

Thalia looked at Hall critically. She sniffed.

"He needs a bath! And some food probably . . . with a wig to cover that bald head and some city clothes, suitably padded, even the Leader won't recognize him."

Hall shifted uneasily, scenting purposes unknown to him.

"Why have you brought me here?" he blurted out.

Thalia studied him thoughtfully.

"Why did you come here in the first place?" she parried. "To destroy the city? I doubt that. More likely the mutants want to take it over themselves, to gain control, certainly—and that means eliminating the Council, destroying the Brain, and seizing the nuclear pile. You see, Hall, we have that much in common . . . only instead of working for the mutants, you'll be working for us—with your life forfeit if you try to double-cross us."

"I don't understand," he said.

"Like hell you don't!" Botticelli snapped. "I suppose you're going to deny that the mutants are out to seize the city?"

He struggled to grasp their viewpoint—but it was all so strange. He could not understand how they could think that way. They seemed to believe there were others, like him, out there in the wasteland.

"There are no mutants," he said at length. "Beyond the city, there is only the creeping death, the dust that kills. All is death. There is no-one to attack your city!"

Thalia gave a little gasp. Her face was white—whiter than its normal alabaster shade.

"You mean," she whispered, "that the Earth is dead?"

He nodded slowly.

"Dead. The burning death creeps everywhere. Nowhere is there life. No trees. No men. Nothing!"

It overwhelmed her. She sank back onto the damask and gold counterpane and buried her face in her hands.

"Then everything is finished," she said bitterly. "Our struggle is useless—worse than useless . . . "

"We don't know if he is telling the truth!" Botticelli pointed out.

"There were others," Hall went on, struggling for words, "others like me, but that was long ago." Again, he tried to remember how long. It was beyond him. "But they died—I was the only one to adapt completely. I was alone out there—now, the Earth is lifeless!"

Thalia gave him a long look.

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"Yes," she said heavily. "He is telling the truth."

No-one said anything for some minutes. Botticelli put away his blaster. Thalia sat with her head between her hands. Hall shifted from one foot to another, wondering what more he could say.

"Can I have my bath now?" he asked.

Thalia nodded listlessly. She pointed to a door. He went over and opened it. Beyond was a tiled cubicle, the bath set in the floor. He ran hot water, emptied scented bath-salts into it till the perfume almost overwhelmed him. He stripped off his clothes and relaxed, enjoying the luxury of apparently limitless water.

Botticelli came in and collected his rags.

"I'll destroy these," he said, and went out.

Hall continued to enjoy his bath and thought about Thalia. He had not imagined a woman could look so beautiful, but then he had not seen one for so long — and never one with flaming red hair. He thought about her a lot as he lathered his gaunt frame with scented soap.

Botticelli came back with fresh clothes as he was drying himself with an embroidered towel.

"First time I've seen a *completely* hairless man," the flamboyant man called out.

Thalia appeared in the doorway.

"It's a good thing Delmar isn't here—we'd be treated to a lecture on the effects of radiation."

She watched Hall dress and her eyes regained a little of the fire they had lost.

"Not bad," she said, eyeing him critically. "Feed him up a bit and he'd be handsome." She appeared lost in thought for some minutes, then—"I suppose he *must* be sterile —living out there . . . "

Botticelli shrugged.

"Who can say? The fact that he adapted to conditions implies a radical change in cellular structure. Anything *might* be possible . . . but I thought you didn't want children?"

She regarded Hall with a new light in her violet eyes.

"Not while the Council rule!" Her voice took on a more wistful tone. "But if there were a chance of . . ."

Her voice died away.

"The Earth is dead!"

They went back to the living room, after Botticelli had emptied the bath and flushed it through with fresh water. The soap, sponge and towel he had used were destroyed.

Thalia crossed to a window and drew back the curtains.

"Look down there," she said.

Hall stood beside her, looking down into the abyss between the giant buildings. He had not realized they were so high up. The wall opposite was studded with oblong windows, stepped diagonally, and towards ground level they appeared as parallel lines approaching infinity. Beyond the opposite building, he could see the curve of the translucent dome covering the city, and the shimmering energy screen outside.

He looked down and saw orderly

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rows of dots moving in unison.

"The police have surrounded the block," Thalia said calmly. "When they have men stationed on all floors, the search will commence. I wonder if Delmar has the teleporter ready?"

She raised her arm and spoke into the dial on her wrist.

"Delmar," she said softly.

The answering voice was the merest whisper.

"All ready."

There came an authoritative knock at the door. Thalia and Botticelli exchanged glances.

"Open in the name of the Leader!" a voice thundered.

Hall watched Thalia lift her wrist and speak into the dial:

"Now!"

For the brief instant before Delmar operated the teleporter, Hall looked deep into Thalia's violet eyes —and, suddenly, he knew why he had come to the city.

III

He was in another room, a larger room, sombre in color, and austere. Its lack of embellishment indicated a bachelor's apartment. Scattered items of scientific equipment told of a man immersed in his work to the exclusion of all else.

Delmar switched off the teleporter and turned to Hall. He was alone.

"How do you feel?" the short man asked, trembling his moustache with a brown-stained finger. "We haven't had the teleporter long enough to measure its effect on the human body—and you are the first person to be transported twice in so short a period. Your body is undoubtedly of a different structure, too — though, theoretically, that should make no difference."

"I feel all right," Hall said, and added: "But hungry!"

"I'll get you some food."

Delmar opened a metal door set in the bare, plastic wall and brought out a box of capsules.

"Concentrated extracts of protein and vitamin with a high calorie content," he explained. "How long since you last ate?"

"One moon," he said.

Delmar seemed to be translating his reply into a more familiar timescale.

"You'd better take two capsules —no more. The results of overeating can be extremely painful."

Hall washed down the capsules with a glass of water. They were quite tasteless. He watched Delmar pace the room.

"You're nervous," he accused. "Because of me?"

Delmar stopped his pacing.

"No," he said sharply. "I'm worried in case the Leader had detectors trained on Thalia's apartment when I teleported you—if he did, you can bet the police are on their way here, right now!"

"Why don't we go somewhere else, then?"

Delmar snorted.

"You don't seem to realize you're a marked man — marked down for

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death! It would be fatal to move out into the open."

He listened to the dial on his wrist. A whispered command sent him scurrying to the teleporter. His hands moved dials — he pulled a switch.

It seemed to Hall that the center of the room was empty — then, abruptly, Thalia stood before him, her gossamer-sheer gown eddying slightly as if in a breeze. Her flaming-red hair matched the superb ruby glittering between her breasts. To Hall, she seemed twice as beautiful after their brief separation.

She ignored him, snapped at Delmar.

"Everything went all right; there was nothing to rouse their suspicions. You can bring Botticelli here now."

Delmar spun the dials again; he pulled the switch. Botticelli appeared, blond and flamboyant, the blaster swinging in a holster at his hip. Delmar switched off the teleporter.

Thalia swept a litter of tangled wiring off of a low divan and curled her lithe body in a slender arch.

"Really, Delmar," she scolded, "you have no idea of comfort—you ought to find a wife to look after you!" She turned to Hall. "Tell Delmar about — outside."

Hall faced the short man and retold his story. Delmar listened, absorbed, his mind retaining only the scientific implications. He seemed unimpressed by the fact that life no longer existed outside the city. At the end of Hall's story, he nodded slightly.

"The only surprising thing," he commented dryly, "is that even *one* man should adapt to such rigorous conditions."

"But don't you see what it means?" Thalia snapped, irritated by his detached outlook. "The Earth is dead! While we believed life was still possible outside, there was always the hope that, by seizing control here, we could start colonizing again . . . now, it's hopeless!"

She looked sadly at Hall. He thought her face beautiful even when she was sad.

"All our work wasted—Delmar's genius—everything wasted! What are we going to do?"

Botticelli swung round, his face angry.

"It's not like you to give up, Thalia. The revolution *must* go on. With power taken from the Council, at least we'll be able to live without fear—to die of old age! Perhaps the radiation outside will stop one day —perhaps Delmar can figure a way to reclaim the wastelands . . . "

Hall was bewildered by the talk of revolution. He turned to Thalia.

"I don't understand," he said. "I wish you would tell me what it is you are doing."

She laughed, a trifle hysterically.

"He doesn't understand! My God! —the one person we were banking on to help us—doesn't understand!"

Botticelli glared at her.

"The position has changed completely. Before, we had assumed a world of mutants, knowing about the

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city, and determined to seize it. Now, we know Hall is the last of the mutants — of course, he doesn't know anything—but he may yet be our master trick!"

Thalia stared hard at Hall. She said:

"I'll tell you about the city."

He sat at her feet, listening to her soft, sad voice.

"We don't know much about the period before the city. The records are incomplete — and incredible — but if what is written is true, the Earth must have been such a paradise as we shall never know again.

"The hills and valleys were lush with verdure; trees blossomed and flowers grew in wild profusion; birds sang and the skies were blue; the sun gave warmth and the moon light; crystal rivers swarmed with exotic fish. The people lived an idyllic life. Their every need was served by machines; their food produced; clothes manufactured; homes renovated; everything was done for them—all they had to do was enjoy it."

"But the art of living is one not easily learned—and the peoples of Earth were divided in twain, the white races of the west and the coloured—predominantly yellow—races of the east."

"The two races intermingled, but clung rigidly to their own ways, traditions and taboos — and all the while scientific advancement was going forward, accelerating constantly. Hand in hand with developments benefiting the race, the weapons of war grew in increasing deadliness. It was the age of atomic power—and atomic death!"

Thalia stopped. Her large, violet eyes glistened with tears. She went on:

"Perhaps many people saw that a clash was inevitable—but only one man had the vision to see what the clash must mean. We don't know his name—we know nothing about him at all—except that he built this city and dedicated it to the future of the human race."

"It must have been an enormous undertaking, even in those days, but at last it was completed — a city, self-contained, and protected by the energy screen. War came with unexpected suddenness — perhaps the city itself provoked the attack. Atomic death consumed the Earth; deadly radiation spread across the surface of the planet, destroying attacked and attacker without discrimination."

"The machines stopped—and with them, food production. People died in millions, from radiation, from starvation, from plague. Only *inside* the city could life go on . . . "

"Generations passed. Outside, the remnants of humanity clustered in isolated islands where the radiation had not yet reached. The grass withered; trees died; plants would not grow—and, slowly, the people outside—*changed!*"

"Births became fewer because radiation sterilized the people; those births that did take place produced monsters, mental deficients, horrors

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which could scarcely have come from a human womb. The mutants banded together for attacks on the city, knowing that only within its protecting walls could they live — but the screen held."

Hall stirred at Thalia's feet. His memory brought back stories he had heard in distant days when he had not been the only living creature outside the city. The pieces of the jigsaw began to fit.

Delmar looked up from his visi-screen.

"The Council are meeting," he reported. "The city has been searched and—of course—they have not found Hall. The Leader is deciding what new action to take."

Hall turned to Thalia, impatient to hear more.

"But now," he said, "you talk of revolution. Why?"

Thalia moved restlessly.

"Children," she said softly. "What use is a race without children? How can we advance? How can we recapture the glories of the past while the Council . . . "

"The city, you must understand, is completely self-contained. Living space, food, air, all are based on a constant, unchanging population. There can be no increase while we are contained within the walls of this city."

"At first it was different. The unknown man who built for the future, allowed for three generations — he *must* have had some plan in mind to cope with the situation after that time, but we do not know what it was. The records have been lost."

"Laws were made prohibiting births, except in strict proportion to the death rate—and that was phenomenally low in a well-organized community where illness and sudden death were unknown. The Council of Six had a powerful weapon in their hands—those obeying their whims were granted license to beget children. And those objecting to their decree were doomed to sterility — with death as a deterrent!"

"In recent times, the Leader has used this lever to gain dictatorial powers. Backed by the Council — and the Brain! — he assumes the mantle of a God, dispensing favors to a select group and trampling the mass of the population underfoot."

She stopped again.

"The Brain," Hall said. "What is it?"

She hesitated, choosing her words with care.

"We're not sure. Basically, it is a machine—a mechanical calculator to solve problems in logic when data is put to it. Why the man who built the city should have designed such a monstrous thing—no-one knows."

"The Leader relies implicitly on the Brain for solving his problems. Only members of the Council are allowed to put questions — and the word of the Brain is law. The people are told that, because the Brain can give *only* a logical answer, then that answer *must* be best for the city."

"This, of course, is absurd! People are made of flesh and blood; they have feelings and emotions — and

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these, no machine is qualified to pass judgment on. Whatever the true nature of the Brain, for whatever purpose it was designed — it was not this!"

"For several years, I, with Botticelli and Delmar, have been organizing a rebel group to smash the Leader's power and start colonizing outside the city. Delmar designed the teleporter, alone and without the Council's knowledge—that was to be our surprise weapon."

"When we heard of your entrance to the city, we assumed you already had plans to destroy the Brain and seize power, and we intended to use you for our own purposes. Now, even if we gain control of the city, there is no hope for the future . . . "

Botticelli scowled.

"We can still take the city," he said. "The Leader thinks Hall is some kind of superman with the power to disappear at will — he will be concentrating all his efforts on killing him. That gives us a cover. *Now* is the time to strike!"

Hall struggled with an idea.

"When the Brain answered the Leader's questions, it said I was a threat to the authority of the Council—not to the city itself. I should like to go to the Brain and ask what was meant by that."

Botticelli laughed harshly.

"And how do you propose getting there? You'll be killed as soon as you step into the Council Hall!"

"It's impossible," Thalia said heavily.

Delmar raised his hand suddenly.

"Quiet! The Leader is speaking."

He turned up the volume and the Leader's deep voice echoed through the room.

"People of the city. By now, you all know that a mutant is loose within these walls. A search has been made, without success, and it must be assumed there is a high probability of his remaining hidden somewhere in the city. This mutant is undoubtedly the vanguard of a treacherous attack. He is dangerous and *must* be destroyed!"

"Every citizen must be alert for this mutant. Only the police will be allowed on the streets until he is caught. A new search will be made and you are ordered to give all possible help in trapping him."

"He is easy to recognize — tall, brown-skinned, with a gaunt face and deepset eyes. He is dressed in rags and is completely hairless. Watch for a man with a bald head —if you see him, destroy him instantly!"

The Leader paused and a note of triumph tinged his voice.

"To the person who kills this mutant, license will be granted to beget three children—and the parents will be allowed to remain within the city walls! Remember, he is a threat to the security of the city — *and must be destroyed!*"

IV

There was a moment of silence throughout the room. Thalia lifted horror-stricken eyes to Hall. She

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moaned softly.

"The position is hopeless! With that incentive, you are safe from no-one—every citizen's hand will be against you. We dare not show you to our own people even—to get a license for three children is unheard of . . . "

Botticelli looked at Hall calculatingly.

"To understand the real meaning of the reward," he said, "you must realize that, normally, when more than one child is born, the parents —or some less-favored citizens — are turned out of the city to die! Only in that way can the delicate balance of life be maintained."

Thalia watched Botticelli's face. She half-turned to Hall, and said: "You are no longer safe in this room!"

The flamboyant man smiled.

"You are wrong, Thalia," he said gently. "*You* won't turn him over —and Delmar thinks only of his work. As for myself, it is *your* children I want—and I know what little chance I'd have with you if I killed Hall."

Hall's eyes fixed on Thalia's face. He saw her crimson under his gaze.

Delmar looked up from the visi-screen.

"Botticelli is right," he said. "Hall is safe enough with the three of us. Now, we must decide what action we are going to take."

Botticelli's face lit up.

"We must stick to our original plan. One by one, the members of the Council must be abducted by teleporter—and killed!"

Delmar frowned.

"We have already discussed the dangers inherent in that plan. If even one member was seen to vanish, the Council would guess what was happening—and we should be hounded down and killed before our work is complete. We should be throwing away our lives for nothing —power would still rest with the remaining members of the Council."

"And they would have the teleporter!" Thalia added.

There was a despondent silence, then Hall spoke.

"Couldn't you transmit me to the Hall of the Brain from here? I feel certain that the Brain holds the solution to your problem—my problem now—and I believe I am the one destined to learn the truth."

"Impossible!" Delmar snapped. "The teleporter can only draw things *to* it—not transmit them the other way. Theoretically, it's possible—but it would take months of research to make the necessary changes."

Hall paced the room restlessly.

"Well then, abduct the Leader and bring him here. I'll force him at the point of a blaster to give me safe conduct to the Brain!"

"And what good would that do?" Botticelli snarled.

"I don't know how to put it," Hall said slowly, "but I feel that if only I could confront the Brain and find out why it considered me a threat to the Council, but not the city — and what the data was that made the Leader's question meaningless—then

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the whole position would be changed."

Thalia nodded her flame-coloured head slowly.

"There is certainly a mystery there—perhaps . . . "

She came to a decision.

"Delmar," she snapped, "abduct the Leader!"

The scientist bent over his teleporter. He spun dials; pulled a switch.

Botticelli's blaster jumped into his hand as the Leader suddenly appeared in the room.

"One careless move," the flamboyant man said harshly, "and the city will need a new Leader."

The Leader turned slowly, his steely eyes taking in the four occupants of the room. He had overcome his first feeling of shock at finding himself transported. His face was a hard mask.

"Now, I know the ring-leaders of the rebel group," he said coldly. "I have always known there was a plot to undermine the authority of the Council, but until now, I had been unaware of the identities of those behind the movement."

"It's not going to do you any good!" Botticelli rapped.

"You have condemned yourselves to death by this stupid kidnapping," the Leader said. "For the unforgivable treachery of aiding a mutant against the city, you will all die!"

"If anyone dies, it will be you!" Botticelli snarled.

Thalia faced the Leader.

"You are going to conduct us to the Hall of the Brain," she told him. "Botticelli will be covering you with his blaster—and at the first sign of treachery, he'll shoot! Delmar, you stay here with the teleporter. If things go wrong, use your own initiative."

The Leader stared hard at Thalia. His granite features creased in a tight smile.

"I'll escort you willingly — but you'll never escape alive!"

Thalia crossed the room and opened the door.

"You first," she said, nodding to the Leader. "Botticelli, you keep right behind him."

The flamboyant man jabbed the muzzle of his blaster into the Leader's back to encourage him and the party moved across to the elevator. They shot down to ground level and walked out onto the street.

There were no civilians about, but a police cordon was drawn round the block. The section leader challenged them—went for his blaster when he saw Hall.

"The mutant!"

Botticelli nudged the Leader.

"Wait! He is our prisoner—I'm escorting him to the Council in person."

The police gave way before the Leader, and Hall, with Thalia and Botticelli, marched boldly up the broad avenue through the center of the city towards the Council Hall. The police closed in behind them, following at a respectful distance. Once more, Hall passed through the arched portal and stood before the

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Brain.

The Leader sneered.

"You'll never get out of here — the place is surrounded. You might as well give yourselves up now!"

Botticelli reminded him who was the prisoner.

Hall stared at the Brain. An uneasy feeling beset him—if he was wrong, he had thrown away his life . . . and Thalia's. He looked into her face, searched the violet eyes, and gained new strength from her belief in him.

"Give instructions for the machine to be prepared for questioning," he snapped at the Leader.

The Leader barked a command at the man in the white coat.

"Stop!"

Bysshe-Percy came into the chamber, a squad of armed police at his back. The Leader jumped as Botticelli viciously jabbed the blaster into his back.

"One more step and your Leader dies—throw down your arms!"

The police hesitated, looking to Bysshe-Percy for instructions. The thin, pale-faced Deputy-Leader grabbed a blaster from the man nearest him. His arm came up—a blast of energy roared across the chamber—and the Leader doubled up and slid to the floor, a hole burnt clear through his chest.

"So much for your hostage," Bysshe-Percy jeered. "I am the Leader now!"

He turned to the police at his back.

"Kill them—all except the girl. I want *her* alive!"

Botticelli's blaster swung in an arc to cover Bysshe-Percy, but before he could shoot, the new Leader vanished before their eyes.

Thalia laughed softly.

"Thanks Delmar," she whispered. "You got us out of a tight spot!"

The police were temporarily demoralized. Hall took advantage of their confusion. He stepped forward and raised his hand.

"I am endowed with superhuman powers," he cried. "You saw what happened to your Leader; I can remove you in the same way. Now, throw down your weapons and leave the chamber."

For a moment, he had doubts if his bluff would work—but the police had seen Bysshe-Percy disappear as if he had never existed. Their blasters clattered on the floor and they bolted for the door.

Botticelli turned his weapon on the man in the white coat.

"You'll do exactly as the mutant tells you if you want to go on living," he grunted.

Hall faced the Brain.

"Feed it the original data about me," he instructed the man in the white coat.

The attendant hastened to do as he was told. The Brain clicked relays; lights flashed intermittantly.

"Data prepared."

"First question," Hall said. "Am I a threat to the existence of the city?"

Relays buzzed deep in the labyrinth of wires and tubes. A punched

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card emerged from the rejection slot.

Hall took a deep breath.

"Where can I find the data which made the last question meaningless?"

Another delay while the machine worked.

"The data regarding the imminent change in the situation of the city may be found in the Hall of Power."

"Third question. What plans had the builder of the city made for an increase in population exceeding the number it was designed to house?"

Question rejected.

"Where can I find the data which made the last question meaningless?"

"The data on city population may be found in the Hall of Power."

"Fourth question. For what purpose were you designed?"

He was aware that both Thalia and Botticelli were hanging on the answer, their bodies tensed, breath held in check.

"The purpose of my construction is implicit in the directions for operation which will be found in the Hall of Power."

Hall turned to the man in the white coat.

"That's all—leave us."

The attendant bolted like a scared rabbit. Hall smiled at Thalia.

"Where is this Hall of Power?" he asked. "It seems to hold the answers to a lot of important questions."

Her face was leaden.

"It's useless," she said slowly. "The Hall of Power contains the atomic pile which energizes the screen round the city. It also feeds the machines which produce our food and clothes, lights and heats the city. But it is death to enter—the chamber is filled with radiation."

Botticelli laughed suddenly.

"I knew Hall would turn out to be our master trick—*he* is the one man who *can* enter unharmed!"

Thalia gasped. Her face lit up excitedly.

"Of course! I'd forgotten . . . "

"Take me there," Hall commanded.

They crossed the chamber and took an elevator, descending into the depths. As the cage fell, Thalia explained:

"The city is constructed in the shape of a cylinder—all you have seen up until now, are the living quarters under the translucent dome. Below, extending for miles into the Earth, are floors where the machines produce our needs, storerooms, and other services. The Hall of Power is at the very base of the city."

He had no idea how far they must have dropped. There was no indication of motion inside the elevator cage, but, at last, it stopped and the door slid open.

A vast arch led to heavy sealed doors set in a wall of lead.

"Beyond those doors," Botticelli said, "lies—what? Death for us — but for you? Who knows?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems strange," Hall mused, "that the one chamber where the secret lies is flooded with radiation."

"It hasn't always been like that," Thalia replied. "But soon after the

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city was screened from outside, a fissure appeared in one of the walls of the pile — and radiation leaked out. That was when the Hall of Power was sealed off. It operates automatically, of course."

Hall nodded and looked at the lead doors.

"They can be opened?"

Botticelli pointed at a masked control panel.

"Leave that to me—Thalia and I will shelter there till you are through. Then I'll reseal the doors—you can signal when you're ready to come out."

He walked over to the control panel, leaving Hall with Thalia.

"You'll be careful in there? Don't take any chances."

Her face showed anxiety for him.

"I'll be all right."

Hall looked into her violet eyes and saw they were shining a little. She was very close, her carmined lips bare inches from his.

"Come back," she whispered. "You know I want you to father my children . . . "

For a brief moment, she leaned her warm body to him, their lips met—then she moved swiftly to the control panel.

Hall signalled to Botticelli. He saw the flamboyant man pull a lever. Slowly, the lead doors opened.

V

He stood in a vast chamber. Behind him, the doors were shut tight, sealing off the radiation from the city. His skin tingled again — and he relived his life outside.

He moved silently over the dusty floor, leaving footprints where no man had trod for generations. As he walked between the machines, he thought of Thalia. Her kiss was still moist on his lips and he knew he would go back to her—but first, there was something he must do.

It was silent in the Hall of Power. The atomic pile operated without a whisper of sound, ceaselessly converting matter to energy as it had since first the unknown builder of the city had set it in motion.

Hall stared about him, marvelling at the mind of the man who had conceived this refuge for mankind. He could sense the tremendous power, enslaved to drive the city, pulsing behind thick leaden walls. At the far end, a long black panel carried instruments and gauges, rows and rows of them. Hall studied the flickering needles, then turned away. They meant nothing to him.

He continued round the chamber, looking for— He wasn't quite sure what it was he was looking for, but he knew that, somewhere, the secret of the city waited to be rediscovered.

There was a raised dais, with steps leading to a single, velvet-seated chair. It stood alone, a solitary seat commanding a view over the atomic plant. Hall climbed the steps and sat down, looking across the chamber.

The voice seemed to come out of

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the air, filling the chamber with lingering echoes.

"War has ravaged the Earth, stripping all life from its surface. You, who follow, I know not how many generations in my future, are destined to carry the glory of the past to new heights."

Hall felt his body stiffen. He knew he was listening to a voice out of the past, the voice of the unknown man who had built the city—the voice of a man long dead.

"The Earth will never again be able to support the human race — that much is evident from my studies of radioactivity. As the years pass, the soil of the planet will crumble to dust, plants wither and die. All forms of life must inevitably succumb to the deadly radiation let loose by the fools who saw only an easy victory in releasing atomic death upon their neighbors."

"The people inside the city must relinquish all hope of re-colonizing this planet. Nothing can stop the spread of radio-activity. The Earth was killed in one second of insanity —and will remain forever, dead!"

"Once this unpleasant truth is accepted, the moment of despair surmounted, then, you who follow, can go on to fulfill the destiny for which this city was created. It was obvious, from the first moment I conceived the idea of the city, that the population must increase with passing generations; that eventually, the city would not be large enough to contain the human race—and, make no mistake, the entire population of the race is bounded by the walls of this city!—that room for expansion would become vital if the race was not to degenerate."

"Where was the room for expansion to come from? The Earth would not be fit to colonize—but the Earth is only *one* planet, and the universe swarms with stars—stars with planets . . . perhaps even one star with a planet similar in surface conditions to our own. *A new Earth!*"

"So the city was designed to travel through space—not just a city, but a ship! A vessel to traverse the black infinities between the stars, for it was obvious that none of the other planets in our own system could support human life. An interstellar ship—*and you are its crew!*"

The voice paused, its echoes hanging on the silent air. Hall sat motionless, waiting for the voice to continue.

"The ship will be driven by rockets, powered by the atomic plant you see before you now, the same plant that has maintained life in the city. The Mechanical Brain was designed to plot all possible orbits through space, to decide problems in logic which will inevitably occur once you reach alien soil. Do not despise your mechanical servant — its calculations are essential to your success . . . to the future of the race."

"My recorded voice speaks across the years, to you, the descendants of the original refugees who took shelter in the city, and now I wish you God-speed. I shall never know you

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—and you, who hold the future of the race in your hands, can never know me, a ghost of the past. *Per aspera ad astra!"*

There was a moment's silence, then the voice of the unknown man began to repeat its recorded message:

"War has ravaged the Earth . . ."

Hall rose from his seat and descended the steps from the dais — and, automatically, the voice stopped. He walked slowly down the dusty aisle between the machines, seeing for the first time, the full scope of their creator's vision.

He stared at the silent power plant around him. How long had that energy been leashed, waiting for its true purpose to be revealed? If it had not been for the fissure, releasing radiation into the chamber, the ship would have left long ago on its appointed journey.

He remembered—outside. How he was the last of a long chain of mutations, each leading up to one man —himself—one man who could live in a radioactive world. He seemed to see, in his own past, a greater plan . . . in which he and the builder of the city were but two pawns in a plot to drive men to the stars.

A new heritage loomed before him —out there, in the vastnesses of space where tiny dots of light winked in velvety blackness, a new home waited to be discovered. A new environment to mould mankind.

He shook off his reverie. There was much to do — new things to learn. The silence all around him became suddenly terrifying and he yearned to hear again the sound of human voices—the voices of people who lived, and hoped.

His stride quickened as he thought of Thalia. He smelt the intoxicating perfume of her flaming hair, knew again the moistness of her carmined lips. She waited for him beyond the doors, waited for him to bring her hope for the future—for the future of their children.

He pressed the button to tell Botticelli he was ready to leave the chamber. Slowly, the lead doors opened.

THE END

COMING IN THE JUNE ISSUE

Beyond The Darkness ..... **S. J. Byrne**

The Fledermaus Report ..... **R. Bretnor**

Mr. Yellow Jacket ..... **Ray Palmer**

The Tin You Love To Touch ..... **Robert Bloch**

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NEWS OF THE MONTH

Latest reports on what our readers are doing. Fan clubs, social events and personalities in the limelight.

On a memorable week-end in May last year a small group of fans and professionals gathered at Bellefontaine, Ohio for a meeting which was called The Ohio Conference. Among those attending were such well-known fans as Art Rapp, Roy and Deedee Lavender, Martin Alger, Don Ford, George Young, Lou Tabakow, George Earley, Stan Skirvin, Neil de Jack, Bob Tucker and scores of others. On the professional side we found such names as David H. Keller, Basil Wells, Randall Garrett, David Gordon, E. E. Smith, Lloyd Eshbach, Ray Palmer and Bob Tucker (yes, Bob gets listed twice since he falls into both categories).

This conference was such a success that it was decided then and there to hold another one in 1951—which brings us up to the present time, and the fact that The Second Ohio Conference is scheduled for May 19 & 20, 1951. Since it is receiving wider publicity than the first conference, and a larger attendance is expected, the conference committee has made arrangements with one of the summer resort hotels at Indian Lake, Ohio to open a week early to accommodate the science-fiction clan. There you have it—a science-fiction fan's dream come true—the hotel is accepting reservations from conference attendees only!

Plans for the program are still in the formative stage and will be published in the next issue of OW, together with a partial list of fans and pros planning to attend. Specific information available so far is: *a*) the conference is being jointly sponsored by the Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati fan groups; *b*) the program will include an auction; and *c*) the hotel is Beatley's-on-the-Lake, Indian Lake, Russell Point, Ohio. When writing for a reservation, be sure to state that you are planning to attend the Ohio Conference. If you go by train or bus, when you arrive at Bellefontaine go directly to the office of Dr. C. L. Barrett, who will provide transportation to the hotel at Indian Lake.

This seems to be the beginning of the season for regional conferences. The Queens Science Fiction League sends word that they are preparing for their fifth science-fiction conclave, to be held at the Roosevelt Hotel. As soon as a definite date has been decided upon, we'll pass the information on to you. Those of you in the Queens area who would like more information should write to The Queens Science Fiction League, P. O. Box 4, Steinway Station, Long Island City 3, New York.

As you probably noticed, there was a slight error on the March OW cover in which *The Eye of the Temptress* was credited to Rog Phillips. This has resulted in letters asking who *did* write the story, and even a few wanting to know if Ray Palmer and Rog Phillips are one and the same. Just to keep the record straight, the story was written by Editor Palmer,

(*continued on page* 139)

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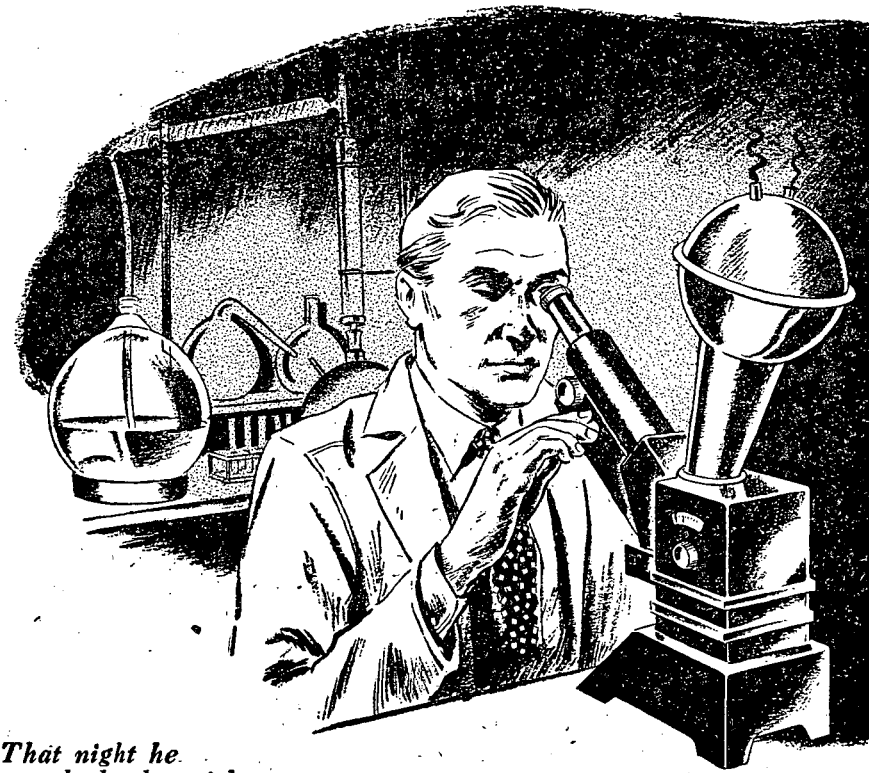

That night he watched the girl with a fresh awareness.

TAILS YOU LOSE

By H. B. Hickey

Wiggons was undoubtedly the happiest man on Earth, for tomorrow night a space ship would carry him to the golden city and the golden girl who waited there for him. But then Sir Lushley told a strange story . . .

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"MY thesis," said Sir Lushley, "will be the spheroid character of man's fate; how, trapped within that sphere, he is forever doomed to retrace his own steps. I have borrowed from Kirkegaard, I admit my debt to the doctrine of predestination. But mainly I draw from the philosophers of pessimism."

"No pessimism," I begged. "Not tonight. Tonight I am Earth's happiest citizen."

And I was. Never before had the other members of the Galileans seemed such a good lot to me. Seen through the window before which Lushley and I stood, Chicago's skyline was particularly inspiring this evening.

And, of course, there were the stars. Especially *the* star. I gazed at it and glowed within.

"By jove," Sir Lushley said. "You

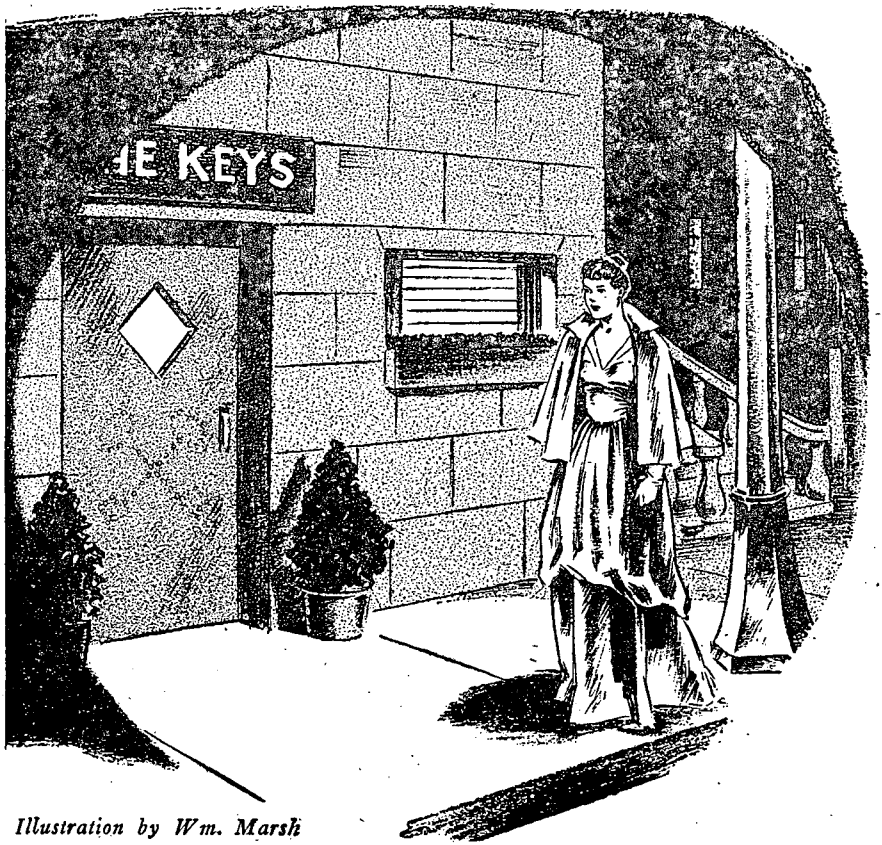

Illustration by Wm. Marsh

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do look positively radiant. What's got into you, Wiggons?"

I savored the moment. I had to tell; I couldn't keep it back. But I took it slowly.

"Lushley," I said, "when that first space ship leaves Earth tomorrow night, I shall be on it."

"The devil you say!"

"Not the devil. I. Wiggons."

"But that's impossible. There will be only five men—"

"I know. One of them chosen by the president of this club. And it happens that our good president has reason to grant any request I might make."

And I thought of the city of spires. And I thought of the golden, golden girl who lived in that city. I thought of her and I smiled.

"Now look, old chap, that's foolishness," Sir Lushley said. "Were you an explorer, a flier, even an astro-physicist—. But for a not too robust man to venture into he knows not what—"

"That's just the point. I do know. I *do* know!"

And I was about to tell him of my great discovery, about the Wiggons lens. But Lushley interrupted.

"It's no good, old fellow. Let me tell you a story."

"No sad stories," I laughed. "Let's have a drink instead. I'll toss you for it."

"But— Oh, very well." He fished out a coin and prepared to flip it into the air.

"Heads I win, tails you lose," I said.

"Righto." He flipped the coin.

"Tails," I said. "You lose."

The drinks had already arrived when Sir Lushley came to realize he had been tricked. However, he was not angry. Rather he was thoughtful.

"Precisely," he murmured. "Just the point I started to make. Either way, heads or tails . . ."

He broke off and reached into his pocket and brought out his wallet. Opening the wallet, he drew out an old photograph. It was the picture of a girl with great dark eyes and dark hair and a perfect oval of a face.

"Lovely, what?" Sir Lushley asked.

I said there was no denying the fact that she was utterly lovely. And then, before I could stop him, Sir Lushley had launched his story.

FOG as thick as cream soup enveloped London that evening. Sir Lushley was not even aware of it until his wife mentioned the fact. He had just come in and given his coat to the butler.

"You've been out without your rubbers again, you idiot," his wife's voice boomed at him.

"Why, so I have."

He rose on tiptoe and pecked at her substantial cheek, closing his ears to her description of what his life would be without her to order his every move. Then an icy glitter entered her eye.

"And I suppose you forgot the flowers for my mother."

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"I did not." He chuckled. "Fooled you. Wrote it down. Sent her two dozen roses."

There was a pause and Sir Lushley quailed. His wife's massive jaw was swinging his way, like the prow of a battleship. Her eyes were sixteen inch cannon.

"You blathering, blithering idiot! You know my mother gets deadly ill at the smell of roses. You imbecile! If I weren't here to push a kerchief into your hand you'd forget to wipe your nose!"

He made his escape while she rumbled off to phone her mother and warn against accepting the florist's box. Why she needed a phone, he wondered, with a voice like that—.

Lady Lushley's voice was a distant boom as he reached the top floor and unlocked his sanctum sanctorum, his laboratory. This was the one place his wife would not enter, had never entered in the five years of their marriage.

"Where he keeps his foul smelling toys," she'd sniff. Actually, she was a bit afraid of the strange equipment.

And actually it was as fine a laboratory as any professional would want. Born chinless and wealthy, Sir Lushley had been an utter flop at rugger and cricket, but a whiz at physics, chemistry and mathematics.

After graduation they had wanted him to stay on as a professor. But his father had dictated marriage and his wife did not care for a working husband.

So the top floor of the mansion had become his own, and here he was happy. Once inside this door he forgot the termagant he had married. This was where Sir Lushley Dunn *lived.*

And tonight he was *living!* Tonight he had brought with him the final lens for the Sir Lushley Dunn microscope! Fitting the lens into the eyepiece, he thought to himself what a stir this thing would make when he finally told the world of it.

But first he wanted to have some fun. Soon enough they would know the electron microscope had been surpassed. But first—.

He flicked a switch and a molecule of water swam into focus. A single molecule and yet Sir Lushley remained unstirred. So much had been done by others. But *now!*

Another switch and the molecule divided, here the oxygen atom visible and here the hydrogen. Then even the hydrogen atoms were out of the picture and there lay before him a single atom of oxygen.

He gasped with joy. Electrons swirled about a nucleus that was a blazing sun! It was a world, a *universe!* Planets, stars, a macrocosm within the microcosm!

This was wonderful. Sir Lushley trembled with excitement. His hand paused, then closed on a knob. The knob turned.

All motion ceased. In the grip of a magnetic field, the electrons froze in their orbits.

"Eenie, meenie, minie, mo," Sir

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Lushley murmured.

His interest was held by a single electron. Bringing it into sharp focus, he narrowed down the field of vision until there was nothing but that one in view.

Steadily it grew until it filled the viewer. Now it was no longer a smooth spherical object. There were rough spots on its surface.

The rough spots grew until there was no smoothness. That had been the illusion created by distance.

A single spot grew into a continent, the continent grew too large for the lens. Now it was just a single city that unfolded.

The time must have been dusk. Against a clouded sky the towers were dark. As the sky darkened the towers lit up, window by window. And below were the canyons that were streets.

Into them Sir Lushley descended. It was only a visual descent, but real enough to quicken his blood.

A street, not so well lit, and figures moving. One of the figures caught his eye, as it would have caught any man's. It was a girl. Sir Lushley caught his breath.

The door rattled. It was his wife.

"We've guests, you fool! Now come out of there!"

HOW he got through dinner and the evening, Sir Lushley never knew. The Marquess of Quink was her usual boresome self, the Earl of Pine no better.

Somehow Sir Lushley survived, and even managed to bid them a pleasant good night. He heaved a quiet sigh.

"Now I suppose you'll be going up to your playthings again," his wife grumbled.

"Oh, I don't know." It didn't pay to let her see how anxious he was.

"Not that it matters." Here she showed the resignation of the martyr. "Really, Lushley, if only you weren't such an utter, utter nincompoop. Really."

And that was all right too. Anything was all right. He didn't care what she called him or thought of him. As long as she didn't prevent him going upstairs.

Inside him there was a terrible fear. Suppose when he got back to the microscope things had changed? Who could tell? An hour in his world might be ten lifetimes in that girl's.

Or suppose he couldn't find that same city, that same street? Suppose that she had walked along that street for the first and last time while he observed her?

Some of his fears proved unfounded. The continent was still there, also the city. The street, too, was there, apparently unchanged.

A few of the pedestrians staggered slightly. Some of the establishments seemed to have closed for the night. A few that had been shuttered were now open, brightly illuminated.

But the girl was nowhere to be seen.

Sir Lushley watched for hours, until dawn purpled his window and the eyepiece almost purpled his eye. But

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the girl did not return.

IN Sir Lushley Dunne, although his wife would never have believed it, there was something of the bulldog. He left the magnetic field turned on to hold the electron in place and went off to sleep.

He was back that afternoon and again that evening. A twelve hour vigil with no results.

But the afternoon following his patience was rewarded.

It was dusk again. The street, which Sir Lushley had decided was not too savory, looked exactly the same as on the first day. And the girl came swinging along.

She was such a girl as Sir Lushley had dreamed of in his youth, as many a youth has dreamed of. Her hair was darker than night, her skin whiter than milk. A skin-tight dress showed a figure that stirred long repressed instincts in Sir Lushley.

He watched her swing along, carrying a large handbag. He followed her until she entered one of the brightly lit establishments. He sat, his eye glued to the eyepiece, for hours. But she did not come out.

And so it went, night after night. There were times, it seemed to Sir Lushley, when she felt his eye upon her. She would stop and stare about, shake her pretty head, and then go on.

That he was in love did not occur to Sir Lushley Dunne for some time. It might have taken longer had it not been for his wife.

"You know," she remarked at tea one afternoon, "you've always been a fool, Lushley. But lately—"

"Two, thank you," he murmured dreamily. "No lemon, please."

Her glare was ominous. "—but lately you're impossible. Wonder you know you're alive. Or do you? If it weren't ridiculous I'd say you were acting like a schoolboy in love. Always with that half mad blank stare—"

"You are? I mean, I have?" He dodged a flying teacup. "But my dear, I haven't left the house for days."

NEVERTHELESS, the remark had struck home. Sir Lushley gave it some thought. It must be true. His interest in the sub-atomic world was hardly following scientific lines.

There should be other symptoms, he decided. He'd have to go to sources. The library yielded up its erotica, its Freudiana.

His wife had been correct. He had all the symptoms. In the absence of the love object he was listless, preoccupied. His appetite had failed. His dreams were properly symbolic.

That night he watched the girl with a fresh awareness. No denying the fact, he was in love. She paused to speak to a man and Sir Lushley felt the pangs of jealousy. Dash it, the chap was hardly her type!

It was a foolish infatuation, of course. Sir Lushley realized that much. With cold logic, both two-valued Aristotelian and infinite-valued, he convinced himself.

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There was but one conclusion. *He must have this woman!*

How? Sir Lushley didn't know. But love would find a way. *Amor omnia vincit,* he reminded himself.

Proceeding logically, he narrowed the possibilities to two. He could somehow extract that girl from her electronic plane and bring her up to his own. Or he could somehow reduce himself to her plane.

The first possibility was too remote. Therefore it would have to be the second method.

But again, *how?*

This time Sir Lushley was on more familiar ground. He thought, he pondered. He covered reams of paper with mathematical symbols. The symbols represented energy, mass, matter.

And in those symbols lay the answer. It was a question of speed. As an object increased in speed, it diminished in length.

There were devices for increasing the speed of electrical charges. The cyclotron was one such device. But a man moving at the speed of an electron was doomed.

Nonsense, Sir Lushley decided. The girl was alive, after all.

First, then, a machine to raise his momentum slowly and reduce his size to the point where a cyclotron would handle him. And after the cyclotron another device to further increase his speed. And some aiming mechanism so that he would not land on another electron.

It was a gigantic task. It would require a genius in physics. It would require a genius in mechanics. It would cost a fortune for equipment. And last but not least it would take a genius in military logistics to move the equipment into the house without his wife finding out what was going on.

Sir Lushley was a genius. He also had the necessary fortune. Also the necessary guile.

The job was done. There came the night when Sir Lushley strapped his wife's favorite cat into a seat and turned a knob.

Lightning flashed and crackled. The smell of ozone filled the room. A hum rose to a whine and then passed the point of audibility. Sir Lushley kept his eye glued to the microscope.

He let out a muffled shout of exultation. *The cat was there!* It was unharmed. It rose, it stretched, it sauntered lazily off.

"Amor omnia—" Sir Lushley murmured.

He adjusted his white tie, patted his silk hat, popped his monocle into his left eye, made certain the return mechanism was functioning, and strapped himself into the seat.

It was strange. He had expected the sensation of great speed, of constant acceleration. Instead he felt no motion at all. A slight pressure on his eyes, nothing more.

The pressure grew. There were lights, a great white light. Then a splitting pain across his forehead. And darkness.

SIR Lushley was sitting on something hard and uneven. A rough

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pavement. He shook his head to clear it. A rough hand jerked him erect.

"Whyncha look where you're goin'?" an equally rough voice asked. "Coulda put your eye out on my elbow."

"Quite." Sir Lushley bent and retrieved his monocle.

He noted that he must have walked unwittingly. He should have come out behind that tall fence, alongside the large barrel.

Walking to the fence he tossed a coin over it. The coin sailed through the air until it passed the barrel. Then it vanished. The return mechanism was functioning.

Moving along the street, Sir Lushley felt ill at ease, aware of the glances in his direction. He was glad for the growing darkness.

Ahead and to his right was the establishment into which the girl vanished so regularly. He proceeded in that direction. A large and uncoordinated gentleman staggered across his path.

"Go back to Terguvia," the big man snarled.

Sir Lushley said nothing. He went on. At the intersection another man attempted to thrust a newspaper into his hand.

"Allabouta Terguvian 'lection!"

Sir Lushley had no interest in 'lections, Terguvian or other. He was dimly aware of two faces that filled the front page. One face had a cigar stuck in the middle of it, above a jutting jaw. The other face was mild, mustached, scholarly.

There was also something about the Greis, who apparently had possession of the *dikdik* with which they were about to enslave the world.

It seemed to Sir Lushley that these people must live in an extremely uncertain psychological climate. That would serve to explain the slightly frenzied manner in which some of them were behaving.

It might also help explain the blast of sound which assaulted him as he entered the establishment that was his goal. At first he could not see the source of the sound. He was walking up a dimly lit ramp.

"Checkyer hat?"

Sir Lushley started. A girl had appeared at his elbow. She wore very few clothes. He blushed, then remembered to remove his topper. The girl promptly snatched it from his hand and gave him a brass disk.

"Sharp," she said and gave him an approving wink.

Sir Lushley tested the disk. It wasn't sharp at all. Strange people, these, he thought, and went on into a large room. The sound was louder here. He looked ahead and saw it was being created by a group of men clad in violet suits.

"Alone, Jack?" This from a man who had appeared at his elbow. They had a way of sneaking up.

"Lushley," he said.

"Sure, Jack." The man piloted him to a table.

Another young lady appeared, as scantily clad as the first. She carried a tray containing dolls, flowers, and an assortment of small toys. Sir

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Lushley politely refused to accept any of the gifts.

"Pray tell me," he said, "is there a young lady here who has very dark hair and quite large dark eyes?"

"Yeah." The girl looked sour. "Though it ain't usually her eyes they mention. Stick around. You'll see her."

THERE was suddenly more noise then. The chaps in the violet suits had begun again. The air filled with smoke. Couples gyrated wildly about the floor.

A tribal dance, Sir Lushley thought. He noticed a young man at the table next to him. The young man was acting strangely, although when he saw Sir Lushley he smiled.

"Gone, man!" he shouted. "Real gone!"

"Quite," Sir Lushley replied politely.

He was relieved when the noise stopped. The lights dimmed. Then faint music of an oriental flavor.

And then the girl.

She came out slowly, floating rather than walking, her body swaying to the rhythm of the drums. She wore a long gown, cut low, and long black gloves.

Across the floor she moved, a mysterious smile tugging at her lips. The music was faster now. She began a strange strutting motion. Slowly she began to peel off one of the gloves.

Somewhere between the removal of the first and second gloves Sir Lushley became conscious of the fact that she was aware of his presence.

It was quite natural, he realized. There must be a rapport between them.

Her eyes met his and dropped demurely. With halting movements, as though performing a dreaded task, she unfastened a catch at her throat.

One shoulder was exposed. A moment later her other shoulder was bared.

Every movement of her body now caused the gown to slip lower and lower exposing the perfection of her body to everyone's gaze. An admiring whistle escaped the young man near Sir Lushley.

Fortunately for Sir Lushley the dance ended abruptly as the gown slid over her hips. Darkness descended. When the lights came on again she was gone.

Barbaric, he thought. Beyond a doubt she was forced to do this, held in some sort of bondage. And in that case she needed help.

He caught the eye of the man who had ushered him to his table. The man nodded and came over to see what was wanted.

"That young lady—" Sir Lushley began. The man smiled.

"Tinia? Some dish, huh?"

"Ripping," Sir Lushley replied cagily. "That smile. Da Vinci—"

"Vincie? So you're one of his mob?" The man was obviously surprised, even a bit nonplussed. "Takin' on Terguvians, is he?"

His gaze wandered warily toward the entrance. Fear entered his voice.

"Can it, Buster."

"Lushley," Sir Lushley corrected.

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"Can it, can it," the man begged. His voice dropped to a whisper. "Keys just come in. He finds out one of Vincie's boys is here, he'll toss the joint up for grabs."

"Keys?" Sir Lushley was now utterly confused. "We were talking about Tinia."

"Low, schmo. Keep it low," the man begged.

"But—"

"Awright. It's your funeral. Anything, just blow." A jerk of his head indicated the direction Sir Lushley should take.

THE corridor started beside the bandstand and led around behind it. The air was musty and damp, as though a river ran nearby. Sir Lushley headed for a bulb that revealed several doors, all in need of paint.

A light shone from beneath one of the doors. There was nothing to do but knock. Sir Lushley knocked.

"Come in," a voice invited.

He entered, and immediately covered his eyes with his hands. When he dared look again she had finished buttoning her dress. She was more beautiful than he had thought.

"Oh, it's you."

"Of course. You felt my presence, you saw me, I sensed the entreaty in your eyes."

"Take it easy. You're racing your motor, Mac."

"Lushley. Sir Lushley Dunne," he corrected, and wondered at the strangeness of this world where any name might be attached to a stranger. How many names had *she?*

But there was no time for idle speculation. "I've come to take you from this awful place," he said.

"You've—?" Her face brightened. "You're a scout!"

"Scout? Why—"

Her eyes grew cold. "What is this, Mac? A new pitch? I'm not interested in etchings."

"No, no. You don't understand. I've come to help you. You won't have to stay here any longer."

"No? And what'll I eat?"

The poor girl. They even held the threat of starvation over her head. Sir Lushley was appalled, but determined.

"Don't worry. I've plenty of money. Filthy with it, really. If necessary I'll ransom you."

"You have? You are? I mean, you will?"

"Of course. You *do* believe me, don't you?"

Her eyes were round with the wonder of it. "I guess I do." She smiled. "I like you. You're cute."

It was a wonderful moment for Sir Lushley. There *was* rapport, as he had known there would be. The light in her eyes must be the light of love.

He took her in his arms and held her close.

"My dear," he whispered. Her own arms tightened around his neck. Her lips met his.

"Sugar daddy," she murmured.

Suddenly her grasp loosened. There was a moment of silence. Sir Lushley became aware that there

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was another presence in the room with them.

"*Keys!*" the girl whispered. The fear of death was in her voice.

HE was a slender man, very dark and intense. He wore a dark blue suit and a white hat. His right hand was deep in his coat pocket. For a long time he remained silent.

"So that's how it is," he said at last, very softly.

"No! You don't get it, Keys."

"I get it, baby." He surveyed Sir Lushley. "Gilt edge, huh, baby?"

A key chain appeared in his left hand. He twirled the chain in circles until it became a blur, the keys at the end of it fused into one.

Then suddenly he moved. His hand splatted on the girl's face. With a cry of rage Sir Lushley flung himself at the man.

"You cad!"

A fist connected with Sir Lushley's jaw, driving him backward. When he regained his balance there was a gun in his opponent's hand.

"Let's go," Keys said coldly. "We're taking a walk."

She flung herself at him but he dodged neatly and slapped her again. The gun menaced Sir Lushley so that he could not take advantage of the temporary diversion.

"Let's go," Keys said emotionally. "You two first. Me and the heater behind you. And don't forget; no funny moves."

Directly behind them as they went out, he ordered a turn to the right. The corridor wound on, growing darker as they got further from the single bulb. At last the corridor ended.

The girl stopped, shivering.

"Go on," Keys directed.

She opened the door and she and Sir Lushley stepped out into an alley littered with trash. They stumbled along until another alley intersected and then were prodded down that one.

And at the end of that there was a street. It was a dark and gloomy street, made gloomier because of the lights that shone from the city's towers not far off.

How far they walked Sir Lushley did not know. He saw the buildings around them grow more and more decrepit, the street lights grow dimmer and further apart. The smell of the river was strong.

Then he and the girl walked into a great shadow created by the sagging shell of an old structure.

"This is it," Keys said.

They turned and saw the gun come out of his pocket. Sir Lushley flinched. Even in the company of his love, death was not easy to face. The gun barrel tilted upward at him.

FROM out of nowhere the automobile came, a dark and hurtling thing running without lights. With an ear shattering screech of brakes it slid to a stop at the curb.

"Keys!" a voice shouted. The windows of the car were down.

Keys whirled. He caught the blast of the shotgun full in the face. He

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was falling even as the car gathered momentum for the escape. By the time his body touched the ground the car was roaring out of sight.

"Run!" the girl barked.

Sir Lushley ran. Where or why he did not know, but he ran. They went through dark alleys, over fences, down dismal streets. At last they stopped, both of them panting, gasping for breath.

"Vincie," the girl whispered. "It must have been Vincie." She laughed weakly, hysterically. "What a break. He didn't even see us."

"How do you know?" Sir Lushley demanded.

"Cause we'd be where Keys is if he did."

She looked about furtively. "Listen, sugar, I'd better get back. I'll make it for the second show. Nobody saw me leave. It's a perfect alibi if the bulls get nosey."

"But—"

"Do it like I say. We're only a block or two away. I'll see you after the last show." She stared at him. "You really meant it? About me and you? About taking me away?"

"Of course. I love you, my dear. From the moment I first saw you I've loved you."

Her fingers caressed his face briefly. "Me too, sugar. Now go ahead. Right over that fence and then another fence and you'll be all right."

And then she was gone, fading into the darkness.

Befuddled, Sir Lushley remained where he was for several long minutes. Then, laboriously, he clambered over the fence she had indicated.

He was in a yard with another fence at the other side. Still bemused, he walked to the fence and climbed over it, not even seeing the large barrel beside which he landed as he dropped.

Time stood still. There was a pressure on his eyes and then a great white light. Then a momentary blackness.

Sir Lushley opened his eyes. He was back in his laboratory. Someone was banging at his door.

IT was his wife.

"Let me in!" she shouted. "Let me in, you beast, or I'll break down this door!"

Sir Lushley hastened to the door and flung it open. He was brushed aside as his wife barged through, her eyes searching and wild.

"Where is he?" she demanded.

"He? Who?"

"My cat." She seized Sir Lushley by the collar. "Don't lie, you rotter! Jarvis saw you carry him up here."

She flung him aside again, her eyes roving the room. But there was no sign of the cat and her rage turned again on Sir Lushley.

"You've done away with him! In one of your beastly experiments!"

With a howl of wrath she snatched up a chair and lifted it over her head. It came crashing down directly on Sir Lushley's microscope. Another crash and another piece of equipment was shattered.

It was done too quickly for him

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to stop it. Before his eyes the work of years was demolished, his dreams reduced to tangled wire and bits of broken glass . . .

SIR Lushley's eyes were moist as he recalled that frightful scene: I patted his shoulder, knowing how he must have felt.

"You never rebuilt?" I asked.

"What was the use, Wiggons? I'd never be able to find that single electron again."

"Well, too bad," I sympathized.

I thought of that faraway star and of that golden girl and I felt my sympathy increase. But Sir Lushley shook his head.

"I'm not finished, Wiggons. The story, you know, was to prove a point."

And he went on . . .

THERE were dark days, many of them. The laboratory was shut up for good. Sir Lushley sat listlessly while his wife's voice droned on and on. Nothing mattered any more.

A part of him had been left in that other world. And even when he began to go out again it was with a feeling of strangeness, as though he were a wraith returned to his native England.

It was in that state of mind that he found himself on the Mall one afternoon. A news vendor shoved a paper at him and Sir Lushley stared at it, uncomprehending.

Two faces stared back at him. One face was grim, a cigar sticking out of it above a determined jaw, below a bowler hat. The other face wore a mustache, was mild, scholarly.

Where had he seen those faces before? Sir Lushley took the paper, thrust a pound note at the vendor and refused change. He stood there, staring at those two faces.

He read the captions above the faces. Churchill, Atlee. Of course. But there was something more, something of vital importance could he but think of it.

And he could not think of it. Two men, Labor, Tory, but nothing more.

And he might never have found the answer had he not been standing beside the Thames a few evenings later. The time was dusk. The lights of the city were coming on. Beside him two men lingered. Their voices were rough and uncultured.

"Pretty nice."

"Yeah. Y'know, it kinda reminds me of Chi."

"Yeah, along the lake there. Up along the Gold Coast."

Their voices! Sir Lushley turned and stared at them, his eyes growing wild. He moved toward them and they dropped their hands to their coat pockets.

"What's up, Mac?"

"Yeah. What's on your mind, Buster?"

Buster! Mac! Terguvian 'lections, British elections!

"The Gold Coast," Sir Lushley demanded. "Where is it? Where is Chi?"

They told him . . .

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IT was unbelievable. And yet, knowing Sir Lushley, I knew he was not lying.

"So that," I said, "is why you came to America. To Chicago."

He nodded. "Of course. The macrocosm in the microcosm. A world within the world and yet the same world, or a reasonable facsimile."

"Wait," I said. "Don't I recall something about the strange disappearance of Lady Dunne some years ago?"

"Of course." He smiled. "She disappeared, without a trace. They never found her. I was too good a chemist for that. They suspected, of course, but there were no clues."

"You did that? And then you came here? And did you find the girl, Tinia?"

He smiled, and yet there was an infiinite sadness in his smile. "Of course I found her, or her double. That's the point of the story."

He was about to continue when there came a sudden interruption. It was a shout, a screech, a bellow of rage.

A woman came thundering toward us.

She was the same woman, the woman of the photograph Sir Lushley had showed me. The same black hair, the same eyes.

But the skin was no longer white. It was blotchy. The eyes were sunk in pools of fat. The delicate features had become massive and malignant.

"You worm!" she shouted. "So this is where you been hangin' out!"

And with no more ado she seized him by the collar and jerked him to his feet and marched him off. He had time to turn and look back at me. I saw his lips move.

"Tails you lose," was what he said.

I UNDERSTOOD then what Sir Lushley had meant by his remarks on man's fate.

He had gone far, further than any man before him. And he had come back to the same point from which he had started. That point was himself.

Each man had his own particular doom; he could not escape it. There were many sides, but only one coin.

I looked up and saw the president of the Galileans approaching my table. He wore his most polite smile, about to ask a favor or offer one.

"Ah, Wiggons, there you are."

"Here I am," I said dully.

I thought about the Wiggons lens, about that faraway star and the city of spires and the golden, golden girl. And I thought of Sir Lushley, who had known what was in my mind.

"No, thank you," I said.

"But—" the president sputtered, "I was going to offer—"

"I know. And I'm refusing. Someone else can be on the first interstellar flight."

I left him with his mouth open as I went to phone my wife to tell her I would be home for dinner. But before I sat down to dinner I would smash the Wiggons lens to bits.

THE END

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THE MAN FROM MARS

By Rog Phillips

Business hadn't been too good for Gus Harper, so he welcomed a chance to take on a routine "missing person" case. Routine, that is, until The Man From Mars made his appearance.

GUS Harper was a type that every private investigator would like to be. He was tall, broad shouldered, fast as lightning, faultless in his judgment, and a natural magnet for interesting cases involving beautiful, unattached females. He had a wide reputation for invariable success in his work — in his dreams—and he always had plenty of time to indulge in dreams.

Actually his dream life wasn't too different from reality—except in a few essentials. Business seldom came

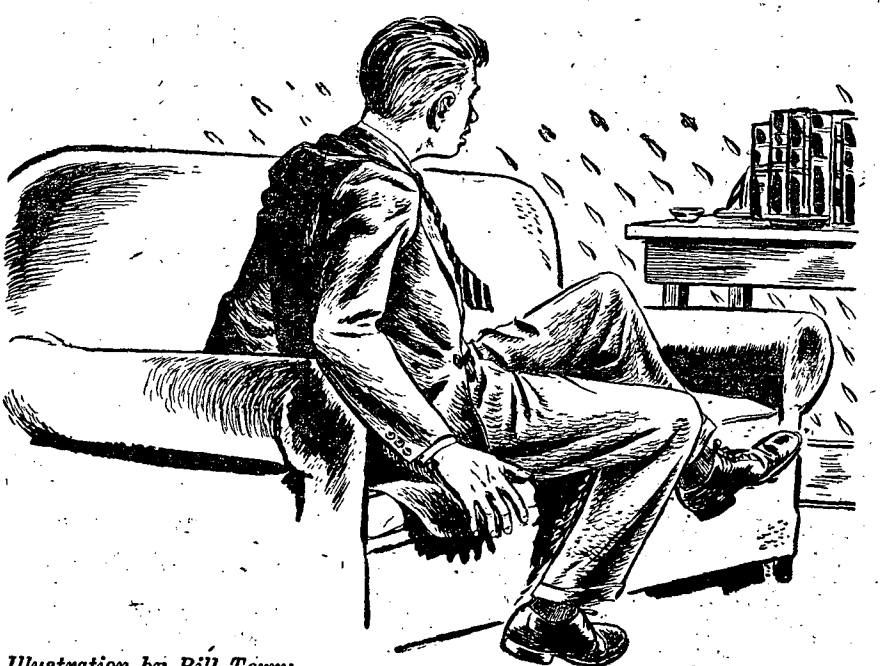

Illustration by Bill Terry

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his way, and when it did it was generally a penny pinching husband who wanted evidence on his wife so he could get a divorce and avoid alimony. One a week of this kind would have been phenomenal business, and would bring a precarious forty a week.

Gus's shoulders were broad enough, but his chest was flat. Flat in a way that suggests ranginess in a man oozing success, and suggests TB in one whose exercise consists of going out twice a day for another pack of cigarettes.

If there had been any business to bring out his latent talents, they would have tended toward impulsive

Gus felt Joe's breath on his neck as he watched the two identical men facing each other.

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and direct actions, rather than sure judgment and keen deduction.

To sum Gus Harper up in one brief statement, he was not brilliant, but he was a genius. A contradiction of terms? No.

THE man stepped through the door into Gus's office without knocking. His eyes darted fearfully around the room. He was somewhat shorter than Gus's six feet, a little narrower in the shoulders and thicker in the chest. His hair was a faded dull brown in contrast to Gus's hair. Where Gus had a sharp, well-formed nose, the newcomer's was rather thick, with a distinct cleft at its rounded point. There also was a distinctive scar running from his cheekbone to the lobe of his ear on his left cheek.

"A perfectly identifiable man," was Gus's estimate.

"Harper Investigations?" the man asked.

"That's right," Gus said. "What can I do for you?"

The man crossed to the desk hesitantly, fumbling inside his coat. As he sat down he brought out a white rectangle of thick paper that appeared to be the backside of a photograph.

"You do investigations?" he asked lamely.

"It depends on what kind," Gus said.

"I mean, look for people."

"Certainly," Gus said, dropping his feet off the desk and straightening up. "We have an international service. In a week we can locate anyone still in the United States. In ten days we can locate anyone in the world for you." He eyed the back of the photograph invitingly.

"How much do you charge?"

"It depends," Gus said slowly. "If you want a rush job we can put several men on it full time. If you aren't in a hurry we can run it into our regular routine."

The stranger let his eyes run around the room as though wondering who Gus meant by *we*, since the office was large enough for only the investigator and a not-too-fat client.

"I'm in a hurry," he said abruptly. Then he seemed to mentally back down. "H-how much does *that* cost?"

Gus turned his eyes to the ceiling, apparently to figure, actually to conceal his bluff.

"Twenty-five dollars a day per man, with three men on it," he said, "would make seventy-five a day for the men, plus twenty-five for the office makes a hundred dollars a day."

"That's reasonable."

The stranger's tones were so quiet and calm that Gus stared at him sharply, trying to detect some undercurrent.

The man, oblivious of Gus's stare, was calmly taking out a packed billfold. He extracted six fifty-dollar bills and laid them on the corner of the desk.

With a jerk Gus opened the top drawer and brought out a receipt book and pen. Poising the pen over a blank receipt he looked up inquiringly.

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"Who shall I make the receipt out to?" he asked.

"G. Harper."

"Gee Har-per," Gus wrote. "Say! That's the same as my name!"

He tore out the receipt with a flourish and handed it to the stranger, picking up the money and depositing it in his own billfold quickly.

"Now," he said, "who is this person I—*we* must locate?"

"I'm in a hurry," the stranger said, laying the photograph on the desk face down, keeping his hand on it so Gus couldn't have taken it without being rude. "Call me when you have located the man, or need more money. Good day."

He stood up. Gus hesitated, then decided politeness was the better part of curiosity. He stood up and shook hands with his client. The hand was cold and rubbery in his.

"I'll do that, Mr. Harper," he said, going to the door with him.

As soon as the man was gone, Gus went to the desk and turned the photograph over.

It was a perfect likeness of the man who had just left!

The sharp knock on the office door snapped Gus out of the paralysis of surprise that gripped him. He laid the photograph face down on the desk.

He jerked the door open abruptly and frowned when he saw the young man standing there, hat in hand.

"Come in," he said, still frowning.

As the young man stepped past him into the office, Gus bent over far enough to see up and down in the hall. Mr. Harper, if that was his name, was not in sight.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, closing the door and going to his desk. He waved carelessly at the empty chair for the other to sit down.

"I want you to investigate something," the young man said vaguely.

Gus lit a cigarette silently, studying his new client. The young man was perhaps twenty-two, uncomfortable in his present surroundings, not used to wearing a suit, starched collar and tie. He was probably from the country, a somewhat introverted farm hand, maybe. The strong calloused hands further added to the probability of his being a farm hand.

"Go on," Gus said.

"It's somebody who claims he's from Mars."

"And of course he isn't," Gus said.

"I don't know. That's what I want you to find out."

"You don't need me," Gus said magnanimously. "He can't be from Mars. It just isn't possible."

"The way he says it it's possible."

"I suppose he claims he came on a flying saucer?" Gus said mockingly.

"Oh no. He was never really on Mars. He doesn't claim he ever was."

"Let me get this straight," Gus said with elaborate patience. "He claims to be from Mars, but he admits he never was on Mars?"

"Yes. He worked in a service station. One day he got an urge and

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just walked away from his job, hitched a ride all day, then got out near a wooded strip on Meadow Creek. He took off all his clothes and left them there, then walked a couple of miles. Finally he went out into the middle of a corn field, laid down and went to sleep. He knew something was going to happen."

"I should say it would!" Gus murmured.

"When he woke up he was from Mars."

"That's what happened?" Gus asked. The young man nodded. "And you want me to find out if that really happened, or if he only imagined it?" The young man nodded again.

"How—ah—how much are you prepared to pay to find out?" Gus said.

"You don't have to worry about that," the young man said eagerly. "I've read lots of detective stories, an attic full, since I was a kid."

He took a billfold out of his breast pocket and counted out five one hundred dollar bills.

"I got them at the bank just this morning," he said. "It's your retainer. I—I think I have enough for your fee, or can get it. I have three thousand, two hundred and eighty dollars left in the bank, and Mr. Blake said he'd be glad to loan me the rest on my farm."

Gus stared at him, his eyes large and round.

"What's the matter?" the young man asked, worry appearing in his expression. "Isn't it enough?"

Gus shook his head dazedly.

"You'll have to forgive me," he said. "I don't think I'm well today. I feel a little—queer."

"Gee, I hope you don't get sick. You've got to find out for sure whether he's from Mars or not. It's important."

Gus glanced down at the five crisp century notes and nodded vaguely. Suddenly his eyes shifted to the white back of the photograph and he pursed his lips thoughtfully at a sudden idea.

"Did you ever see this man?" he asked. He turned the photo over and pointed to the face in it.

"That's him!" the young man exclaimed. "Why, how did you know about him already?"

"That's a professional secret," Gus said smoothly. "All right, I'll take the case. Where is this man now, on your farm?"

"Yes."

"LET me get this straight," Gus said, "you left him on your farm, asleep, and came straight to the city and to my office without pausing anywhere."

"That's right, Mr. Harper."

"All right, Joe. Joe Purvis. Right?"

"Yes sir, thats my name, Mr. Harper."

"All right, Joe," Gus said, "let me handle this when we get to your —"

"Turn here," Joe interrupted.

"Does he suspect you went in to engage expert help to investigate him?" Gus asked.

"Oh, no sir, Mr. Harper!" Joe said.

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"It's that place just ahead."

"Don't let on that I'm armed," Gus warned. "If he's a dangerous lunatic I want to be able to catch him by surprise. I'll know just as soon as I talk to him a minute."

Gus stopped his car near the house, shut off the motor and coasted silently the last fifty feet.

"Where was he sleeping?" he asked softly.

"In the front room," Joe said. "Irma was in the kitchen. She's my wife. We just got married last fall."

"O.K., Joe, we'll go in through the kitchen and find out from Irma if he's still there."

They stole up the back steps. Through the glass in the door Gus saw a young lady of perhaps twenty, looking very nice and homey in a bright print dress, stirring something in a steaming kettle over a spotless electric range. His estimation of Joe Purvis shot up ten thousand percent.

Joe pushed the door open and let Gus enter ahead of him.

"This is Mr. Harper, Irma," he said. "Is he still asleep?"

"Glad to know you, Mr. Harper," Irma said. "Yes. He hasn't stirred since you left, Joe. I've peeked in every five minutes."

"Good!" Gus said. "Where is he?"

"Right in here," Irma said, going to a door and opening it. "Right over there." She pointed to a couch.

Gus looked where she pointed. There was no one on the couch.

"Where'd he —" Gus looked at Irma, then at the empty couch again. A sly light appeared in his eyes. "Go over and wake him, Mrs. Purvis."

"Uh-uh!" Irma said. "I wouldn't go near him! You wake him."

Gus looked over at the empty couch again. Another inspiration hit him. He turned to Joe who was standing in the doorway. Joe was looking from Gus to Irma to the empty couch, his expression calm.

"You wake him, Joe," Gus said. "Go on. Go over to the couch and shake him."

Joe looked at Gus hesitantly. He opened his mouth to say something, then closed it. There was a frown on his forehead. Suddenly the frown smoothed out and he smiled.

"All right," he said, stepping past Gus.

The amused, anticipatory light in Gus's eyes vanished abruptly when he looked at the couch. On it lay the man who had been in his office just before Joe arrived, and he seemed asleep!

Joe touched the man's shoulder respectfully.

"Wake up," he said. "We've got company."

The man on the couch opened his eyes, yawned widely and looked in Gus's direction. His eyes widened slightly in what seemed genuine surprise. He brought his feet around and sat up.

"Hello," Gus said. "My friend Joe dropped over to my place and claimed he had a man from Mars over at his house. I didn't believe it, so I came over to prove to him

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he's all wet. You aren't from Mars."

"Ah, but *you're* the one who's, ah, all wet, as you say," the man said smiling with easy confidence. "I *am* from Mars."

"No kidding?" Gus said. "How's the weather there been lately."

The man on the couch shivered.

"Let's not speak of such an unpleasant subject," he said. "The weather on Mars? Why do you suppose I came here! It's terribly damp all the time there, rains constantly —very depressing."

"Are you sure?" Gus asked, winking at Joe. "Our scientists claim Mars is practically without a drop of water — dryer than the Sahara Desert."

The man on the couch stared at Gus for a moment.

"Young man," he said irritably. "We're speaking of two different things." He turned his gaze to Irma. "Irma," he said, "I'm hungry. Fix me something to eat."

"Yes sir," she said breathlessly, hurrying into the kitchen, while Joe looked at Gus with pleading apology.

Gus turned his attention back to "the man from Mars" with a new understanding of why Joe Purvis had been willing to put out the fabulous sum he had firmly believed all private investigators get for a morning's investigation. It could be worse than having a mother-in-law live with you.

"Tell me," Gus said. "You have a body just like a human being's. Do all people on Mars have human shape?"

The man's eyes dropped in a disparaging survey of his frame. "Oh, this," he said.

For a minute Gus thought he was going to say, "I had a friend pick it up for me so I'd have something to wear." Then he actually did say it!

"How corny can you get?" Gus murmured.

"What did you say?"

Irma pushed through the kitchen door bearing a tray on which coffee, a cold chicken sandwich, and a large piece of apple pie vied with the dish design and the linen for beauty and richness of color. She brushed past Gus to take it to the man on the couch.

On sudden impulse Gus reached out and took it from her. She paused, paralyzed with surprise and growing alarm, and the "man from Mars" frowned darkly. Gus walked to a chair and sat down, placing the tray in his lap. He picked up a huge half of the sandwich and bit a large corner off of it with supreme unconcern. As he chewed he caught a gleam of well concealed humor in Joe Purvis's eye. His liking for the young farmer shot up even higher, and his desire to return the five hundred dollar retainer to him crystalized into a determination to actually do so later.

That bite into the sandwich had established the finality of ownership. Recognition of it was on the faces of both Irma and the "man from Mars."

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"I'll fix you another," Irma murmured, and fled to the kitchen.

"You surprise me, Mr. Harper," the man on the couch said after Irma had left. "Or rather, I should say the greatness of your stupidity surprises me. One sees so few that are truely great in anything any more."

"I assure you I'm unworthy of such high praise," Gus said, matching his tones. "Actually, it's merely a front to hide my humbleness in the presence of one so much greater than I in his line—which is lying." He punctuated his remark with another bite.

"And what lie did I tell?" the man on the couch asked quietly.

Gus shrugged and worked his jaws unconcernedly.

"What is a lie?" the man on the couch continued. "The truth is a lie if you believe it to be false and assert it as the truth."

Gus blinked slowly, thinking it out. He had little time.

"Even that statement, that the truth is a lie if you believe it to be false and assert it as the truth, is a lie if one asserts it without believing it to be true," the man went on.

"Then I'm telling the truth when I call you a liar," Gus said, "because I believe it."

"Stop changing the subject," the man on the couch said irritably. He placed an elbow on his knee and leaned forward until his chin rested in his hand. "You have an irritating way of twisting the meanings of words. First it was weather. Now it's truth." He watched Gus chew for a moment. "You're a natural dialectician," he concluded.

"I resent that," Gus said. "I've been cleared by the local loyalty board. I've never been a communist in my life. Anyway I lost my party ticket in the hotel fire last winter."

"Your humor is stupidly crude," the "man from Mars" said from the palm of his hand.

"Look, mister," Gus said, gulping down the last of the coffee and setting the tray aside. "I'm a professional investigator. If you're from Mars and don't know what that is, it's a man who investigates people and gets at the root of their actions and their reasons for doing things."

The "man from Mars" turned his eyes on Joe Purvis inscrutably. Joe flinched perceptibly, drawing back a step.

"I'm going to tell you just what happened," Joe went on. "You were working in a service station. Every day you read the comic books when you didn't have any customers. You got to thinking, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if a man from Mars came to the Earth!' So one day you decided to be the man from Mars yourself. Only you argued it in such a way, with your ideas of truth being *anything you believe,* that you made yourself believe that it *would* be true if you succeeded in making someone believe it!"

Gus paused to admire his statement. He hadn't realized until he uttered it how profound it was.

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"But you're all wet," he went on. "You aren't from Mars unless you actually came from that planet, regardless of what you believe, or make someone else believe."

Irma opened the door from the kitchen.

"The man from Mars wants you to come in the kitchen," she said.

Gus looked past her. The man was sitting at a table eating a sandwich. Gus's eyes darted back to the couch. The man was also sitting there, his head cupped in his hand. As Gus looked, he vanished.

Weakly Gus stood up and followed Irma into the kitchen. He sat down across the table from the "man from Mars."

"What were you saying about truth?" the man asked with naive innocence.

"You know," Gus said, "I could almost believe you are from Mars. If only you hadn't said it's damp there . . . "

"Turn on the radio, Irma," the man from Mars ordered.

She did so, then brought Gus a cup of coffee. While she was setting it down the radio warmed up.

" . . . the new layer-spectroanalysis technique developed by the astronomers at Palomar," a trained radio voice said. "It's perhaps the greatest scientific advance of this decade. It will reverse most of the present beliefs about the Sun and the Planets. Mars is definitely proven to be a very wet planet, and much smaller than previously thought. What we had thought to be its surface is in reality the top surface of its cold layer."

"Shut it off," the man from Mars said. Irma jumped to comply.

Gus stared blankly at the calm face of the man. Then slowly he sneered.

"Imagine!" he mocked. "The radio comes on at any old station for ten seconds, and the announcer backs you up with the 'latest scientific discovery'!" His shoulders sagged imperceptibly. "I must admit, though, that you're the greatest hypnotist I've ever heard of. Not even the fakirs of India can do better!"

"Hypnotism?" the man from Mars echoed blankly. "Oh, I see what you mean by the word. An interesting thought, indeed."

He ate at his sandwich absently, thinking it over.

"Tell me," he said suddenly. "Suppose everyone on Earth believed something to be true. That would of course make it the truth —"

"It would not," Gus said.

"You see only what you look for," the man from Mars said. "I am here. I say that Mars is damp. Immediately scientific instruments back me up, where before they always said Mars was arid."

"After what I've seen," Gus said, "I'd even doubt that you're here!"

"But you see what I'm driving at? Scientific instruments are merely devices for verifying beliefs. Men build them to look for something they already believe to exist. They're *designed* for that."

"Look," Gus said. "Let's get back

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to something simple. You worked in a service station. One day you got the idea that if you could make people believe you were from Mars, you *would* be. So you went out in a field and took off all your clothes so people would believe you arrived without any, and went to the nearest farmhouse and told these people you were from Mars. You're just a nut. Frankly, isn't that the truth?"

"In one sense of the word you're possibly right," the man from Mars said. "In fact, up to a certain point you *are* right. That point is where I woke up — and actually became what I wanted to be—from Mars."

"I'll ask you a question," the man from Mars said after a long moment of silence. "How did I get the crazy idea in the first place to go out in a field with my clothes off and lie down and go to sleep in the belief that when I woke up I would be, not an Earthman, but a Martian? How many people in the history of the world have done that? Is it a common form of insanity here?"

"No," Gus said, "but publish it in the newspapers and it will be. You're just the first of a long line."

"You're wrong," the man from Mars said. "If I were to go to town right now and walk along the street, four out of five people would know I'm from Mars without anyone telling them."

"There isn't that high a percentage of crazy people," Gus said. "But just for the sake of argument, let's suppose they would believe you are from Mars. That still wouldn't make it the truth. You're just a nut who worked in a service station."

"You're wrong," the man from Mars said. He pushed back his empty plate. "You interest me, Mr. Harper. I think I'll prove to you that you're wrong. Let's go into town. The very fact that the scientists at Palomar have discovered Mars to be damp proves that the fact that I'm from Mars is spreading."

"I don't get it," Gus said. "You mean to say that a thing can start out by not being true, and become true?"

"You're getting off the subject again," the man from Mars said. "You're becoming dialectic."

"I don't know about that," Gus said, "but I'm beginning to see why so many psychiatrists go crazy eventually."

In the back of his mind he decided to keep the five hundred retainer Joe Purvis had given him. In fact, he decided, he was being underpaid at any price.

"Suppose we go," the man from Mars said.

Two hours later a very dazed Gus Harper parked his car beside the house again. The man from Mars, wearing a smirk on his face climbed out of the car and led the way into the house.

"What happened?" Joe Purvis asked.

"He had them hypnotized!" Gus said. "Utter strangers ran after him. Crowds gathered wherever he stopped for a minute. The newspaper re-

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porters interviewed him—and they all take it for granted he's from Mars."

"I'm hungry," the man from Mars said. Irma jumped to the pantry to get something to prepare for him.

"I'm convinced then," Joe said. "You're a good investigator, Mr. Harper. I'll get the rest of your fee in the morning when the bank opens and bring it to you."

"Fee be damned!" Gus said. "I don't think he's from Mars. And here's your five hundred back!"

He took out his billfold and took out the money with shaking fingers. When he counted it and found there was more than five hundred he suddenly remembered that other fee.

"And another thing," he said fixing the Man from Mars with an intent stare, "I can prove you're crazy right now." He turned to Joe Purvis, opening his mouth. Then he closed it, feeling foolish. He had recalled that Irma would swear the man had been there all during the time Joe had been gone, and couldn't have come up to the office. It would be useless to even attempt to prove anything.

"How can you prove it?" the man from Mars mocked.

"I guess I can't," Gus said sourly. "But you know it, and I know it."

"Why don't you keep the five hundred and give up?" Joe said.

"I'll keep the five hundred then," Gus said, "and thanks. But," he turned his eyes to the man from Mars, "did you ever have a twin brother or a double?"

"No," he answered, and Gus could read nothing in his expression to tell whether he was lying or not.

THE front pages of the newspapers carried nothing but news of the man from Mars. The newspapers didn't raise the question of whether he was a genuine Martian or not. In fact, they had the tone of certainty that he was from Mars.

Gus read the accounts over his evening meal. As he'd driven back to the city he had passed caravans of people going out to see the man from Mars. He had parked his car and gone back to the office. There he had alternately studied the photo of the man and gone to the window to watch the private planes streaming to the city from all directions. In them were reporters from all over the country coming to interview the man from Mars.

Gus had paced the short confines of his office as his frustration increased. He had recalled the answer someone had given long ago to the question, "How would Christ be able to prove to a skeptical world that he was Christ if he came back to Earth?" The answer had been, "He wouldn't have to. Everyone would *know* it!"

Everyone seemed to *know* the "man from Mars" was from Mars! It was as simple as that. Everyone, that is, except Gus Harper.

What was his angle? Why had he come up to the office and engaged Gus to look for him, himself? And where did he get the photo if he ap-

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peared at the Purvis farm stark naked? Insane?

"Oh, brother!" Gus said aloud.

It was insane, but maybe it was the least insane of the things that had happened. The whole pattern was crazy.

The frustration choking Gus mounted unbearably. He gave up trying to think and went out and bought a paper. He had a few drinks, then settled down at his usual table in the Elite Grill and read, a sour frown on his face.

Everyone was accepting the authenticity of the man from Mars with a naivity that was nauseating. Universities were sending scientists to sit at his feet. The President was coming in two days in his private plane to extend an official welcome from the government.

Some scientist wrote a hasty, full column article on how wonderful it was that the people of Mars were of the same stock as those on Earth.

When Gus finished eating his meal and had read the front page he wore a puzzled frown. How had it all happened, and why had it happened the way it did? Why couldn't the "man from Mars" have just walked into town in the first place? Why had he appeared in the office before Joe Purvis showed up, and paid to have Gus search for him? Why had he waited, and gone to town merely to show Gus he was "wrong?"

That brought up another thing. Why had he been singled out, rather than some better known private investigator? Why had any private investigator been pulled into the setup?

What had taken place was obvious, even though it was incredible. The "man from Mars" had in some way gotten Joe Purvis to come in and hire him to prove or disprove his claims of being from Mars. Then he had come in with Joe, having hypnotized Irma so she saw him lying on the couch every time she looked in.

In town he had either sent Joe on an errand that would kill a few minutes — "hypnotically" since Joe didn't know he was there, or he had hypnotized Joe into "losing" a few minutes some way. He then had come up to the office and hired Gus on that crazy job, and gone just before Joe came along. He had ridden back with them to the farm, making himself invisible by some kind of hypnosis, and had sneaked back onto the couch to replace the hypnotic image lying there.

Phenomenal! The ability to do this would make anyone believe that he wasn't from Earth, if nothing else would. There were, however, supposed to be fakirs in India who could duplicate that.

Yes, what had happened was clear. Clear as mud and half as transparent, but still clear.

The whole thing seemed to be put together in a way that was designed to make Gus go insane, or at least start shooting off his mouth in a way that would convince any alienist he was. What could the "man from Mars" possibly gain by driving in-

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sane an unknown, obscure, private detective, whose income came mostly from divorce cases?

A thought made Gus snort feebly. All that would be needed to bring him to the brink would be for the "man from Mars" to show up at the office in a couple of days and calmly ask him if he had found him!

"Well," Gus muttered to himself as he rose from the table and made his way toward the cashier's cage at the door of the Elite Grill, "two can play that game."

Half an hour later, with a tight grin on his face, he locked up the office for the night and went to his hotel room. He had turned the photo over to the National Detective Association to wire to all major offices. It would cost maybe fifty dollars, but it might turn out to be worth it.

The report from the National Detective Association came two days later. From the photo without any name they had done miracles.

Gus grinned ruefully as he read the first sheet of the report. They had taken the fingerprints on the photo and identified them. One set belonged to him, of course. From the other set they had identified the client. His name really was G. Harper! No known first name. Born in Philadelphia, with no name registered, listed as G. Harper when he applied for a birth certificate during the war.

It traced his general movements from his known employment, concluding with his last job in a service station. He had simply walked off the job two weeks before and vanished.

Gus nodded in satisfaction as he read this. It was as he had expected it to be. Now, if Mr. G. Harper, self styled man from Mars, didn't show up to find out how the "investigation" had gone, he would be very much disappointed.

As if in answer to his wish the door opened and the man from Mars came in. From his manner and expression he seemed to be just a client coming to find out the results of an investigation.

"Ah, Mr. Harper," the man from Mars said. "How goes the investigation. Have you located the man yet?"

"Not yet," Gus said, frowning innocently. "Those things take time, you know. I have the report ready and completed up to the last moment he was seen. He was working in a service station up to two weeks ago, and simply walked off the job. That's as far as we could trace him. We're tracking down a rumor that he's living with a farmer a few miles from town. We should have something on that by tomorrow. You owe fifty dollars expenses for the first three days, in addition to what you've already paid."

"Could I read the report?" the man from Mars asked, laying fifty dollars on the desk.

"Go ahead," Gus shrugged.

He studied the man while he was reading the report. His expression

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was one of interest and concentration, as though he weren't acquainted with the contents of the report.

When the man from Mars finished he laid the report on the desk and looked up at Gus.

"Very good work," he said. He laid two hundred dollars more on the desk and stood up. "I'll be in day after tomorrow. I hope by that time you've located him."

"I hope so too," Gus said. "By the way, how's the weather on Mars lately?"

"On Mars?" the man echoed, looking at Gus queerly. "Oh! Ha ha. You mean all those reports in the paper about a man from Mars. Personally I don't believe it."

"Me neither," Gus said meaningfully.

"Well," the man said, rising, "I'll see you day after tomorrow."

Gus watched him leave without rising. After he had gone he picked up the money and added it to what was in his billfold. He still didn't get up, but sat there, an uneasy frown on his features. He was disturbed. For the first time in his life he was seeing his own inner eye turning suspiciously upon his own makeup. Uneasily he was recalling what some psychologist had once said in an idle conversation: that the real danger of delusory forms of insanity was that the one going insane was always the last one to realize his thoughts were irrational. He generally arrived at a conviction that the rest of the world was insane first. This was the general direction of his own convictions right now.

He shook his head in mute protest. It just wasn't so. He wasn't losing his mind. Back of all that was happening he would eventually find a logical pattern, and when he did he was sure he would find that his own rationality had never wavered.

"You certainly look glum," a voice sounded at his shoulder.

Gus jerked his head around. The voice was that of the man who had just left, the "man from Mars."

The room was empty.

"God!" Gus murmured. "For a minute I thought —"

He took out a crumpled pack of cigarettes. His fingers were trembling visibly as they extracted a bent cigarette and stuck it between his lips.

He lit it and raised his eyes to flick the match out. His eyes widened. He stared at the visitor until the burning match seared his finger. With a muttered curse he threw the match on the floor.

"How'd you get back in?" he asked.

"Back in?" the visitor said. "I've never been here before."

"Oh, sure, sure," Gus said wearily. Suddenly his face brightened. "Say!" he said. "That makes sense!" He looked doubtful and shook his head. "No. There aren't two of you, a Martian *and* G. Harper, the ex service station attendant. There can't be. Martians wouldn't look like Earth people."

"But I am from Mars," the visitor said calmly.

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"And I suppose you know nothing about a G. Harper who hired me to look for a man who looks just like him?" Gus jeered.

"I think perhaps I'd better tell you the truth," the man from Mars said, his expression showing he was doubtful about the wisdom of his decision.

Gus sneered at him, recalling the Martian's definition of truth, and said nothing.

"You see," the man said calmly. "I really am from Mars. I've been on Earth quite a while now, but no one could see me or become aware of me. I couldn't exist unless they did, and there was grave danger in not existing for too long. *I had to find some way of making them aware of me.*"

"I see," Gus said dryly. "You didn't exist at all, and in order to exist you had to make people believe you exist."

"Exactly," the man from Mars said, beaming.

"So what did you do?" Gus asked weakly.

"I waited," the man from Mars said calmly.

"God!" Gus whispered.

"Then one day," the man from Mars went on, unperturbed, "someone thought of me."

"No kidding!" Gus murmured.

"Yes. Unbelievable though it may seem, someone actually did. That errant thought in that person's mind was the first bit of reality I had found to seize upon. I took it and didn't let go. Since I refused to let it go, it remained in his consciousness continually."

"As an obsession," Gus said, nodding.

"Since it remained in his consciousness," the man from Mars went on, "he naturally associated every thought that came to his mind with it, and inevitably he thought of *being* the man from Mars."

"And I suppose you seized on that too?" Gus said.

"Of course," the man from Mars said. "It's the second thing I had been waiting for. With such a solid purchase on existence I was much stronger, and quickly brought him to the point where he would believe with every atom of his being that he was me. When that point was reached he *became* me, and I existed."

"Congratulations," Gus said. "You're one up on me."

"What?" the man from Mars said vaguely. When Gus didn't reply he continued. "Then I found that everything wasn't as nice and smooth as I had expected it to be."

"In what way?" Gus asked.

"I was developing schizoid properties," the man from Mars said. "Not only that, even the two people I was staying with were developing doubts as to my existence. It was something I hadn't foreseen."

"A real surprise?" Gus asked dryly.

"More than that," the man from Mars said. "It was definitely alarming. I had to find out the cause and locate it quickly or in a short time

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I would weaken so much I couldn't retain my grip on existence."

"And then you would cease to exist again," Gus said.

"That's exactly right, but I did locate the source of my trouble. It was you."

"Me?" Gus echoed, jerking upright in his chair.

"Yes, you," the man from Mars said sadly. "I'll explain. You already understand that reality is only what you believe it to be."

"I understand *you* believe that," Gus said. "I don't."

The man from Mars sighed resignedly.

"I'll try a different method to present my thought," he said. "You've undoubtedly heard of geniuses? They're the so-called outstanding minds of each generation."

"The creative minds," Gus said, interested.

"Think of what I've said about things being true only if you believe them to be. Not an ordinary individual, mind you. That type of mind conforms to your idea that you seem so willing to argue with me about. It brings out the point I have to make. A genius can have an idea or a thought that is 'false' according to the realities of existence. The genius is a focal point of the mass consciousness. That is what makes him a genius. Whatever he becomes convinced is true, becomes true."

Gus closed his eyes, feeling his head spinning.

"That is why a genius becomes recognized while the ordinary man who gets an idea contrary to current beliefs remains a failure. Newton dreamed, and his dreams shaped the pattern of the stars. He died. Gradually his influence waned, wavered is the word, perhaps. People began to doubt eventually. Then Einstein dreamed, and the drifting remnants of Newton's dreams coalesced again into the pattern of Einstein's dreams.

"The genii of the West built up a joint dream of science, and their instruments shaped the very foundations of reality into the pattern of their dream. Then the Eastern world coalesced into a separate consciousness mass, and its genii dreamed their own dreams and their instruments disagreed with those of the West."

"And they called each other liars," Gus said, grinning.

"With good cause on each side," the man from Mars said, matching his smile. "But now we can come to the root of my trouble. As you have probably guessed already, the mind I had seized upon was not a genius."

Gus's eyes widened at some inner thought.

"Since he was not a genius," the man from Mars said, "there was pressure from outside his mind that was beginning to weaken my grasp on reality. I followed the lines of this mass pressure impinging on his mind. I obtained a mental triangulation through the minds of Joe and Irma. In that way I located you as the genius standing in the way of my security."

"Me?" Gus exclaimed. "A genius?"

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"Very few genii are ever aware of their true nature," the man from Mars said. "The things you believe, your very thoughts, since you are a genius, actually control to a great extent the beliefs and thoughts of a large segment of humanity. Peppered through the mass mind of the human population are the genii that shape the mass mind. Where their thoughts are in conflict, there is mass conflict of beliefs, and even confusion in nature itself at times.

"If, for a specific example, a genius artist were to come to this city and set up shop, and his ideas of art conflicted with yours, he would have trouble becoming recognized, even though you might never become consciously aware of him, nor hear of his works. On the other hand, if your ideas of art and his agreed, even though the mass of humanity in this locality had different conceptions of art, their conceptions would change rapidly and he would meet with quick success and recognition."

Gus closed his eyes again, painfully.

"A genius is essentially a telepathic broadcast station," the man from Mars continued calmly. "An ordinary man is essentially a telepathic receiver. He's bombarded constantly by the beliefs generated in the genius, since he does not know they are external influences, accepts them as his own beliefs. Can you understand it explained that way? It isn't quite accurate, but it's close enough."

"I think I get it now," Gus said. "You had to go to work on me. Through me you could get the human race to believe you exist."

"That's correct," the man from Mars said. "I suggested to Joe Purvis that he hire you to determine whether I am really what I claim."

"And just to push me off balance," Gus said, "you came up ahead of time and gave me that screwy assignment."

"I what?" the man from Mars said. "You must be mistaken. I remained at the farm, asleep."

Gus studied his face intently. He seemed to be telling the truth. Through Gus's mind were rushing several thoughts. The man from Mars had mentioned certain schizoid traits developing in him. He denied having been in the office a few minutes before he appeared the second time.

Then there was the basic problem of why a man would hire a detective to look for him when he was right there. There was something deeper here than even the man from Mars knew about.

"Well," Gus said. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to become convinced that I am the man from Mars."

"Why?" Gus said. "Everyone else is convinced now."

"Only because you are confused," the man from Mars said. "You won't remain confused forever. You were slowly forcing me out of existence. I have to make you believe." He stared doubtfully at Gus for a moment, then stood up. "I'll leave you

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with your thoughts," he said. Gus watched him go without moving.

WHY would a man hire a detective to hunt for him? That was the core of the whole problem now. How had G. Harper obtained his own photograph? Why hadn't he looked at it and looked in a mirror and located himself without the help of a detective?

Crazy questions, but all the rest of the crazy mess now fitted together into a pattern that was at least imaginable. Where had he obtained the three hundred—no, it was now five hundred and fifty dollars?

If he had taken off everything and gone to the Purvis' farm naked, he couldn't have had the picture and the money with him. He must have gone back home and gotten them.

One of the two, the man from Mars or G. Harper, must be sort of a hypnotic image. Gus regretted not shaking hands with the man from Mars to find out.

Maybe it was G. Harper, who wasn't able to see himself in a mirror, and that might be the reason he wanted to find himself.

Gus shook his head sadly and stood up wearily. Harper couldn't be the shade, because it would take flesh and blood to carry a real photograph and real money. Or were they real?

Alarmed, Gus took out his billfold and made sure it contained the currency. It did. Still, even that wasn't certain. If he was a genius, as the man from Mars claimed, then what he believed existed did exist, and he believed he had gotten the money and the photo!

Gus hadn't seen the man from Mars on the couch when Irma and Joe had. He had seen him when enough time had elapsed for someone to slip out of the car and sneak into the room and lie down there. That pointed to G. Harper's being real and the man from Mars being the shadow, the hypnotic form. Still, how had the real one slipped into the room and lain down without being seen until he had done so?

Gus shook his head dazedly. There just wasn't any way of determining which was the real man when the two were separated. He'd have to give up on that and try some other line.

"I'll start over again," he said aloud. "Why would a man hire a detective to hunt for him?"

Why would a man hire a detective to hunt for anyone? To find out where they are, of course! If there was any sense in it, then G. Harper was seriously hunting for himself, regardless of the reason.

"What would happen," Gus murmured aloud, "if I told G. Harper I could take him right to the man he's looking for? What would happen if he and the man from Mars came face to face?"

Gus left off his pacing to go to the window for the hundredth time and look down at the street. He turned back from the window, glancing at his wristwatch. It was four-

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thirty. A half hour more and he would give up.

He glared at the expressionless door, felt in his pocket for cigarettes, went over to the desk and took a fresh pack out of the bottom drawer.

As he straightened up the doorknob turned.

"Ah!" he said in relief.

The doorknob turned back to normal position without the door opening. Gus jumped to it and threw it open. G. Harper stood outside, his face a study of uncertainty.

"Come on in," Gus said. "What's been holding you?"

When the man still hesitated Gus took his arm and pulled him in, almost rudely, not letting go until he had the door closed.

"I - I - " Harper swallowed loudly. "I've decided to drop the search," he said. "You can forget about it."

Gus stared at him through slitted eyes, then slowly relaxed, a knowing smile on his lips. With slow obviousness he took his keys and locked the door.

"Why did you do that?" Harper asked, not looking directly at Gus.

"Because we're going to get a few things straight before we go any further," Gus said. "Did you know that it's a criminal offense to hire a detective to locate someone and then drop the whole thing when he's found the man?"

"Y-y-y-you've *found* him?" Harper stuttered.

When Gus nodded he began to tremble.

"I've located him," Gus said, "and you're going out to where he is with me and face him."

Harper sagged to the floor slowly, as though his legs had turned to rubber that wouldn't support his weight. Gus stood over him for a moment, then pity overcame him and he stooped down and lifted him up, helping him to a chair.

"As soon as you get enough strength to walk we'll go," he said. "If you make any trouble I'll get the police to come along."

"It's not the police I'm afraid of," the man said so low Gus could barely hear him.

"What's the matter with you?" Gus demanded. "You're my client. I'm in business to protect your interest, not get tough with you. Why don't you take me into your confi- your confidence all the way. I can help you."

"I - I'm afraid," Harper said. "You see —" he shuddered, then took a deep breath. "I've lost my memory. Not only that, I can't remember what goes on for days." His eyes were full of suffering as they looked up at Gus. "The last I remember before standing outside your door just now was when I left two days ago, except that I *know* it was two days ago. I can't even remember leaving the building then."

"Where did you get that picture you gave me a week ago?" Gus demanded.

"I don't know," Harper said quickly. Then, "Yes I do. I saw it in a photographer's window and it looked familiar. I went in and bought

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it. Then I decided to bring it to you and have you locate the man. I felt that since he seemed familiar he would know who I am."

"But you know who you are!" Gus said. "You gave me the name of G. Harper when I wrote out the receipt for your money."

"That was just the name the man in the portrait studio called me," Harper said.

"Why did you pick me?" Gus demanded.

"I - I looked in the phone book," Harper said. "You had the name Harper, and it was a possible clue. Also you were a detective. But I knew when I first saw you that I'd never seen you before."

Gus's shoulders sagged in defeat. It was all so logical. It all hung together.

"Where did you get all the money you gave me?" Gus demanded abruptly.

"I - I just had it."

"You don't know where you got it?"

"No. I just had it. I don't know how I got it."

Gus glared in frustrated rage. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, he could pin down. Suddenly his face lit up.

"Then why don't you want to see this man you've had me search for?" he demanded. "It doesn't seem logical for a man suffering from amnesia to turn his back on the only possibility he sees of finding out who he is!"

"I know it," Harper said almost inaudibly. "It's just that I have a terrible feeling that when I meet him something will happen. I - I think I'd rather die than face him, and I don't know why!"

He looked up at Gus in dumb wonder and a plea for understanding covered his face.

"Come on," Gus said softly. "We're going to go see this man. You'll thank me for it after it's over." In his mind he added a fervent, "I hope."

DURING the trip out to the Purvis' farm, Harper sat beside Gus, misery in every line. Gus kept up a running line of chatter, occasionally forcing him to make some comment, just so he could be sure it was still Harper beside him, and not suddenly the man from Mars.

Would the man from Mars be at the farm, or were they two separate personalities in one body all the time? There were two separate occasions when they had been separate. The first had been when Harper engaged Gus to look for Harper himself while the man from Mars remained at the farm asleep. The second had been when he was talking to the man from Mars, so he thought, when that man from Mars had gone into the kitchen.

Probably the blank periods Harper complained of were the periods when the two were together in the one physical body of which they were both struggling to keep possession. Certainly there weren't two physical bodies now! That would be carrying split personality too far!

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When Gus turned into the driveway of the Purvis house Harper seemed to shrink into a smaller bundle.

"Ever been here before?" Gus asked.

"No!" Harper said. "No!"

Gus drove to the back porch and shut off the motor. Joe came out on the porch.

"Is he inside?" Gus called out.

"Yeah," Joe said.

Gus took Harper by the coat-sleeve and slid out of the car, dragging him with him. He grinned at the way Joe's eyes grew round.

"This is Harper," Gus said.

He brushed past Joe Purvis into the kitchen, dragging Harper with him.

He had to use real physical force to drag him across the kitchen. At the living room door he was behind Harper, pushing him. For a long moment Harper withstood the pressure, then his hand slipped off the door frame and he was against the opening door.

Gus gave a final shove and caught the door, holding it open, his senses keyed up to observe every detail.

The man from Mars was in mid air in the act of springing up from the couch where he had been lying. A split second later he was on his feet.

Gus felt Joe's breath on his neck as he watched the two identical men facing each other.

He had an eerie feeling that what he was seeing was impossible, that it violated the very laws of the Universe. That something would snap. A sudden fear possessed him. Perhaps the Universe, confronted with such an inconsistency within its framework, would stop existing altogether!

Abruptly the man from Mars was not there. Only one figure was left, standing where Harper had been standing—Motionless.

Gus held his breath. What had happened? Had *anything* happened? When that figure turned around, would it be Harper—or the man from Mars?

Slowly the silent figure started to turn. Gus felt his heart pounding painfully. He was watching for the face to come into view. Slowly it did. Its expression was one of newly dawned joy, so intense, it had frozen into place temporarily, but was it joy of Harper—or the man from Mars?

"I can remember!" a hoarse voice escaped from the lips of the man. "I can remember! Do you understand? I can remember!" A wild laugh burst forth. "I can remember! I'm Harper. I work at a service station."

The joy changed abruptly to a puzzled frown. Harper looked around the room vaguely.

"Where's the man you brought me out to see?" he asked.

"Never mind," Gus said. "You've got your memory back now. That's all that matters. Isn't that right, Joe?"

He turned to Joe Purvis with a warning smile.

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"Sure is," Joe said heartily. "We've been taking care of you while you were sick."

"Was I sick?" Harper asked blankly.

"I'll say you were sick," Joe said. "Wasn't he, Irma?"

"Pneumonia, I think," Irma said. "You were out of your head part of the time, too."

"Now I remember the last thing I remember," Harper said happily. "I was out walking. I'd quit my job. Walked off it, to be exact. I found a nice stream to take a swim in, and took off my clothes and dived in. I - I sort of remember getting out and lying down to take a nap. Yes, that's it. I didn't have a towel, so I went out under the sun and laid down."

An unholy impulse possessed Gus.

"Turn on the radio, Irma," he ordered.

She jumped to comply. Shortly the commentator's voice came in.

" . . . the directors of Palomar have ordered an investigation as to who authorized the premature announcement of the discovery of water on Mars. Later examinations have shown that the lines indicating water on Mars have vanished completely . . . "

Gus stepped over and snapped off the radio himself.

"I'll have to be getting back to town," he said.

"Can't you stay for supper?" Joe Purvis asked.

"Got an engagement," Gus lied. He looked over at G. Harper with a friendly smile. "I'd suggest you stick around here until you get your strength."

"Come back soon," Irma called after him as he ran down the back steps and jumped in his car.

He turned the car wildly and picked up speed going down the driveway, skidding into the road. He barely escaped going into the drainage ditch.

He slowed down, suddenly realizing that he was possessed with panic. Somewhere in an obscure corner of his mind *something* had gained a fingerhold. It was hanging on, determined not to let go.

The man from Mars?

Abruptly Gus knew that it was, and that he had the power to dislodge it. He hesitated.

"So you're with *me* now," he said in his thoughts. He felt a wave of friendly eagerness surge into his thoughts in answer.

"One thing I haven't found out for sure yet," Gus said. "Frankly I don't think you ever came from Mars. You weakened things fatally for yourself by saying Mars was damp. If you'd said it was too dry I might have believed you came from there. Even when I felt you existed, I felt sure you weren't from Mars."

"Well," a finger of thought said uncertainly. "Maybe I'm not from Mars, but I must be from someplace."

Gus pondered over this while he turned the car off the sideroad into

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the highway. Suddenly he laughed.

"I know where you're from," he said in his thoughts. "I can even prove where you're from. I'd suggest that you go back there."

"Where am I from?" a thought emerged cautiously into consciousness.

"I'll show you." Gus said. "Before you came here you didn't exist. Right? You're a person. Right? All people in the Sun don't exist. It's too hot for them to!"

He laughed, a trifle too loud, much too mirthfully. Then he felt something slip away, clinging for just an instant before it lost its grip. An exhilarating relief flowed through him.

The man from Mars was *gone*.

A sudden thought made Gus bring out his billfold and look in it. He took out the currency and counted it. Disappointment flooded his face.

Gone also was the five hundred and fifty dollars Harper had given him.

ONCE IN A BLUE MOON

DID you ever see a blue moon? Well Europe did on September 27 last—and they saw a blue sun too! British astronomers first observed it in the United Kingdom, over the North Sea. The blue moon caused quite a controversy, and when they checked with Danish astronomers, they were informed that the sun came up blue in Denmark that morning. What was more, Danish old folk, obsessed with the idea that the world was coming to an end, hurried to their banks and demanded their money. Obviously they intended to "take it with them."

Most other Europeans, however, saw little of either phenomenon, since most of Europe was shrouded in a thick blanket of clouds.

It was the queerest event in the sky since Halley's comet. The older reader may remember that in 1910 the tail of this famous comet turned the sun and moon a variety of odd colors.

In addition to the "end of the world" theory, laymen hazarded the guess that there had been a terrific atomic explosion somewhere in Russia—wishful thinking, no doubt. But astronomers were divided into three groups. Those who played it "safe" said the cause was a pall of smoke from forest fires in Alberta and British Columbia. Those who have explained every phenomenon of weird coloring of the sky in the past, again explained it with the stock "unusual cloud formation in the upper atmosphere." A few, who had read the papers, attributed it to dust thrown into the air from the giant earthquake n the Himalayas.

The third group won a victory when an R.A.F. pilot went up to 38,000 feet and discovered a layer of fine brownish dust 5,000 feet thick. That made its top 43,000 feet up. That's eight miles, approximately. It was a thin victory, for the only similar cloud on record (and that was guesswork as to height) was the after effect of the Krakatoa explosion—and there was no such explosion in the world this time.

Dr. Mogens Ringkjoebing of the Royal Observatory was the only real scientist in the bunch—he said he had no firm theory on the cause. Bravo, Doctor!

However, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the cloud of smoke from the forest fires obscured the sun—and produced no blue color at all. And neither has any other forest fire. North American scientists, therefore, refused to comment on their Old World compatriots' opinions. Offhand, we'd say the Britons and the Danes were having a case of the "blues." And small wonder.

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RED CORAL

By Ray Palmer

Suppose you're in a sunken submarine on the bottom of the ocean, and then just suppose a giant frog walks in and hands you a beautiful blonde wrapped up in a plastic container.

OF course I am out of my head. I am suffering from delusions. For instance, they (or rather, large man-sized frogs!) just brought me a very lovely nude girl encased in a sort of plastic case (like a new toothbrush) bound with brass. I'll call it brass, because if it was gold. . . .

The gift—if that's what it is—is a very nice gesture indeed, but how do I get her out of that thing?

Oh yes, she's alive. She's looking at me right now. Looking at me as if *I* were on exhibit (so to speak) rather than she. She's got very pretty eyes. And, giving her a little closer study, she's got a lot of other pretty things. Cutest little face you ever saw. And her arms and fingers are real graceful when she moves them. Her figure, checking my memory with some of the sunbathers I've seen on the beach at Coney, leaves nothing to be desired—except maybe a way to get her out of that toothbrush dust-jacket.

No harm in trying, is there? Except if she's a delusion, she's liable to vanish, and then I couldn't even look. Well, it seems she wants out, because she's trying to find a seam or something. Doesn't seem to be any . . . darn this floor, it's slippery when it's wet. They (the frogs) slapped an airlock on the side of the submarine and then cut through to the inside. A little water comes in every time they enter the ship.

Outside, through the plastic material the airlock's made of, is nothing but green water, and a lot of pretty red coral. Funny kind of green color to the water; would seem to indicate the sub hasn't sunk too deep. When we went down, though, I thought we were diving straight for hell. Ever hear of Poe's maelstrom? Well, it was like that when the atom bomb went off. It must've punched a hole in the bottom of the ocean, and all the water started to go down the drain. We were twenty miles away from the burst, but the suction got us anyway.

Our puny fleet of survivors was on its way to Easter Island. Three sickly subs with not more than 150 men on them, and a half-dozen women. We figured to sit it out there for ten-twenty years, then venture back

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Illustration by Hannes Bok

to see if the continent was fit for living on again.

Yes, that's all that was left of the war—so far as we knew. Couldn't approach the coast, and there was no radio reply. Those H-bombs sure did the trick—only we didn't think the Commies had so many of them. Where they launched them from we'll never know. Couldn't have been Russia (the civilized parts) because we made that hotter than Hanford with *our* H's. The Captain thought they'd been launched by robot controls, and that the Commies who set them up intended them only for revenge on a super-scale in case they got wiped out.

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Nobody had believed any nation would actually contaminate a whole continent just to win the war; but we did it. Washington, it seems, went nuts. They were nuts from the beginning, if you ask me. If you go in for "armed preparedness" for the "defense of national security" you are only cocking a gun you can't help but shoot off eventually. And the guns they got now (I should say *had*) go off in all directions. They aren't a bit selective. It isn't a matter of sticking a spear into the hired soldier on the other side, and the war's over; you kill all the bystanders too! Worse, you leave the survivors with no place to live on! The "gun" keeps on going off for years in little invisible blasts, but deadly as the big one just the same. With guns like that, you can't "win" a war. Everybody knew that, but they shot off the guns anyway—and I think it's just because they *made* them. Guns have triggers, and some men are trigger-happy. Or else the strain is too much on their nerves and they go potty.

I was in Brooklyn when it all started. Brooklyn's the place they call Heaven, but it's really Hell. Even in peacetime. When the Koreans began arguing, and we butted in, it really stopped looking like Heaven in the imaginations of the "master-race" of Brooklyn (of which I am one) and even through five beers you could see the place was hot! I mean them atom bombs. Everybody in Brooklyn got ideas of being farmers when Truman said we was in it up to our necks. He shoulda known, because he put us there. We Brooklynites got funny ideas about the Constitution, and along with Taft (a farmer from out in the Indian country) we did a lot of yelling about whether he had a right or not. It was never decided if he had a right. The reason was we suddenly found a great big "right" sticking in our fancy pusses. China (that sleeping giant of the East—I read that in an editorial once) wasn't exactly sleeping. She was pushing armies around like water. They ran over the Korean rice paddies like a Spring flood in Cincinnati.

And for some damn reason, we decided we hadda stop 'em. That's when they got me.

I WAS nineteen, and just got a swell job with a future in it in a bookie joint. Not that I was a bookie; I was the soda-jerk in the ice cream parlor that fronted for the place. The draft blew up outa Washington like thunder outa the China Sea—and bingo, that's where I found myself. On a sub, no less.

They had a coupla levers on the sub just like the levers I useta jerk in the ice cream parlor, and all I hadda do was jerk 'em. It was really a simple job once I got my brains right down to it, and ensign j. g. sounded pretty fancy to my ears. Besides, my chem prof in Brooklyn told me how water was very good insulation against radiation—so while I had a choice, I took the sub job.

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That's why I'm alive now—even if I'm outa my head—I guess.

Well, both sides began to line up and first thing we knew, we were pushing ninety cents outa every dollar into "defense." We built up an army in Europe—the Europeans contributed ten divisions to each twenty of ours—and an army in Africa, and one in Alaska, and one in the Congo (mostly black boys who were tired of raising peanuts for the Europeans). Besides that we put air groups on every spit-in-your-eye island in the Pacific, and even in a submarine all you could hear was the roar of jets up in the sky. There was some talk of ninety air groups, but it seemed there was a hundred and ninety. Nobody could tell any more, because everything was secret—even the amount of taxes you paid was secret.

This was so the enemy wouldn't know how many air groups and H-bombs we had. They passed a law so you couldn't change your job, you didn't get your pay-check, only what was left of it after taxes, which were secret, so you never even knew how much you were making. Not that it made any difference, you couldn't get a raise anyway. And if you did, there was nothing to buy with it except parts for jet motors and atomic-motored submarines.

Our isn't atomic-motored. Another reason why we (or is it just me?) aren't dead, like all the rest of the guys. Cheesy little subs like this one were used only for little patrol jobs, sneak attackers waiting for cargo ships. So we never got into the big stuff—except that last blast, which was such a mystery. How it coulda been the Commies who blew that one off, we just don't know. Anyway, it got our whole darn fancy idea of setting up a nice little temporary civilization on Easter Island blown up in our faces. More'n likely it was a dud bomb that didn't go off, or was ditched by some Superfort that couldn't make it to Moscow. Hell of a time for it to pick to explode, just to get three tiny subs with a bunch of sad-sacks running for their lives.

Come to think of it though, we Brooklynites always get it in the neck that way. I been out to the ball-park plenty of times when the Bums got the bum's rush for the pennant in the "crucial serious."

The whole war went off like a chain reaction. It wasn't Korea that started it; you could point back to that 38th Parallel business—and before that, you could point back to Potsdam; and the Atlantic Pact; waiting for the Commies to get to Berlin first; and I guess, if you went back into diplomacy far enough, Martha Washington's long underwear. The whole business, if you think like I do, is the result of stinking thinking. Always somebody making a deal. I never saw a deal that wasn't off the bottom of the deck when it involved trying to make things come your way. I got a funny idea you got to give to get. You got to pat the other guy's back before he pats yours. You got to do the straight

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thing before the other guy follows the same sort of route between two points. The two points in this case were Communism and Capitalism.

Communism is where you get along without money, because it all belongs to the government; Capitalism is where you can't get along without money, and the government takes it away from you in a way even Truman admits it hurts. In both systems, the little guy winds up broke. Only advantage to Capitalism is (was, before the war) you could *not* work if you wanted to, and wind up broke purely on your own initiative, without the help of no government.

BUT that's all gone now. All there is, it seems, is a luscious looking girl in a plastic box. That thing *must* open somehow—they got her into it, didn't they? If there's a way in, there's a way out!

I guess that's what the government thought when they went into Korea . . . that there'd be a way out. There was, but it was on the end of a Chinese prod. We Americans, and especially we Brooklynites, both dislike the prod. So we kept on coming in again. Like Joe Louis kept on coming in long after his jaw was glassier than a White House chandelier. Maybe taking the prod woulda been the way out, but we didn't take it. Instead we went in lots of places. Indo-China, Malaya, Formosa, China itself, and of course, Europe. We stuck more soldiers and tanks and planes in Europe than we thought we had ourselves.

The Commies, I guess, got really scared we not only meant to defend ourselves, but that we considered offense the best defense. So, when underhand tactics failed, they started off the real shebang.

First thing we knew, a couple of our Pacific bases failed to report in at the patrol box. It turned out they'd had an atomic egg laid on them from a sub. From then on it was an A-bomb war, and you'd be surprised how the "hot" areas added up. Pretty soon it got so you hadda be careful where you bailed out of a shot-up jet, because there wasn't a case where you could fly for a half-hour without passing over a hot spot — those jets always take you places faster than you realize.

Darn few soldiers were being baked, though; it was mostly citizens who were turned into interesting bits of radioactive fossils by which future archaeologists will be able to deduce their age from the amount of radioactive carbon-14 in their bones. That is, until the United States (pardon me, the United Nations) started to run out of soldiers, and the Commies seemed to have an inexhaustible supply. That's when Washington went nuts. Afraid, I guess. Anyway, they ordered the H-bombs dropped all over Russia.

The scientists had told them how a couple hundred, dropped in the right spread, would cook the whole country to a neat turn; also they told them how the atmosphere would prove an unpredictable menace by frying distant areas every so often

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outa the stratosphere. It was the rain did that. Every time it rained anywhere, it was a Noah's Delight. Not just a light dew like it useta be — nothing under twelve to twenty inches, and every ounce of it hot.

That didn't make no difference in Washington. They didn't believe the scientists, and besides, they had a lot of hired high-school Ph.D's who would "refute" the "Calamity Janes." They would come out right away with an authoritative statement that thus-and-thus was so-and-so, and they knew *exactly* what the results would be, and they would be exactly as according to Article 5 of Act VI of Amendment 56.

They were always having Amendments; the Constitution kept getting in the way. It held up everything, including "strategic defensive operations by the army, designed to prevent war."

By this time, however, everybody was too scared of the income-tax man to open up his yap. Guys who hollered like Americans, or Brooklynites, found out they had a *right*, but they didn't have *time* due to the necessity of getting their tax straightened out and paying the big slice they "forgot" to pay the past five years. Mostly it figured out to eight bucks and seventy cents, but the doctor bills for nervous prostration were pretty steep. It didn't pay in the end to exercise your Bill of Rights. Nobody ever mentioned your yapping, but you knew that was the reason for the extra eight bucks anyway.

Somehow, in all the "emergency" they never got around to electing a new president. Truman stayed in there until the bomb hit Warm Springs, and then it was the Veep. And that's the way it kept on. The Commies "elected" presidents for us faster than we could build temporary White Houses for them to hide in.

Stalin was reported dead twice during the Korean fracas, and by golly, I think the first report was true. But the Commies just made him immortal, and since nobody, even a Russian, ever got into the Kremlin, it didn't make no difference. Besides, he wasn't in the Kremlin, because when that ceased to decorate Red Square, Commie Directives kept coming over the radio without interruption.

At that, Americans got off better than the British. They got the hell bombed out of them, and the rest of them starved to death. The food supply on their little Island lasted no time at all. The rice in China seemed inexhaustible for the army, and consequently every Chinese was in the army. He didn't ask for any pay, just rice. And it was the same in Russia. Wheat seemed to grow all over Russia, and it didn't cost anything to raise it because there was always plenty of slave labor. Plenty of Britons were happy to take a boat ride by Commie invite for the privilege of helping raise Russian wheat, rather than starve to death on the Island.

Then the radioactive disease hit. Area after area just quit being heard

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from, and suddenly it became obvious the war was about over. It was then that we on the three surviving submarines of our 467th Pacific Submarine Group decided that all that was left for us was to find an Eden that wasn't hot. We decided on Easter Island, because it was senseless to drop A-bombs on a bunch of statues, which was all that inhabited the island, and even at that we wondered how come they hadn't dropped bombs there because it *was* so senseless.

RIGHT after the H-bombs began to go off, though, there was a kind of flurry of interest over red coral. Yeah, that's right, red coral. It was the only thing that had nothing to do about war that got in the papers or on the radio, those last few months. It seemed that a lot of our ships and subs were cracking up on coral reefs out where the water was six miles deep. For a while nobody figured the earthquakes that were getting in their licks for the two years the A-bombs were falling, had any real effect on the world except to settle down the ruins of cities a little more compactly. But then, when the red coral began sticking up out of the Pacific, a few seismologists still left alive and too old to fight (they were over 56, the draft age) began to say maybe we'd upset the Earth's balance, and that the Pacific continent was coming up again, and China and Russia would sink into the sea.

It was nice of them to give preference to China and Russia, but it didn't happen that way. At least it hadn't the last time we saw the China coast. It was still there; just like the California coast when we found out it was too hot to land and radio had quit from the Western Hemisphere.

Anyway, we got several chances to see this coral, and it was true—it was sticking up all over the Pacific. Lots of new islands, but nothing growing on them. If there were any people left on the globe to populate them, maybe in a hundred years they'd be Island Paradises, like the Hawaiian Group. Right now they were just red coral. Lovely stuff, growing like sugar-candy trees right under the surface of the water, or looking like pink baby-behinds sticking out of the water from a distance.

We heard one radio report that the coral had been found to be growing at the rate of several feet a day, but the scientists squelched that one quick. Coral, they said, grew so slow it took thousands of years to grow a few inches. Any kind of fact can be put down pretty quick by an authority. However, the coral *did* grow that fast. We found it out later when we almost ran into a reef ourselves, and took two days trying to get through it. You could almost see it grow.

That was the situation, then. Apparently we were the sole survivors of a world that had destroyed its civilization by putting out too many patents. All them inventions might have been fine, but somebody al-

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ways hadda make a profit on them. Nobody invented things for people to use, only to get a patent so *nobody* could use 'em without paying three times as much as they were worth. If you were in a competitive market, say selling corn, which wasn't patented, you had to watch that price. But if you had a patent on something as necessary as corn, you could really put on the screws. You could charge anything you felt like, and people hadda pay it because nobody else could make it without being sued.

But I better not go off about all the things I think caused civilization to go floppo—that isn't important now that the civilization don't exist no more. Only, I'll remember 'em, so that if ever things get a start again, I'll teach my kids that gadgets gotta be shared by everybody, and none of this patent business.

Really, when you analyze it, the whole thing was selfishness. Greedy lowdown . . . but I said I'd lay off the gab, didn't I?

Well, why not get back to the girl? No sense leaving a dame like that waiting—I must be nuts too!

Say, this plastic thing feels real smooth. Slicker than any plastic I ever felt. And it sure hasn't got a seam. How does she breathe?

A COUPLE of them frogs is looking in the airlock now. Standing there like guys at a peep show, trying to find out what's going on inside. Say, maybe that *is* the pitch —wanta know what'll happen when I get this thing open! Well, you rubbernecks, for your information, I'd like to converse with the little lady, and find out why she's giving me the eye; how come she got in this thing; why the frogs brought her to me; and a heck of a lot of other things that just don't make no sense the way they are. If you think there's going to be lovemaking, this just isn't the time or place for it. Maybe on Easter Island, something could be arranged. This little chick looks like she'd make a good mother for the kids!

Should have some kind of gadget to open this thing . . . Don't these frogs have gadgets? Must have, to *make* such a thing. Say, they do have gadgets, at that! Behind those two comic-book characters looking in is something that looks like all the insides of radio sets I ever saw in my life all scrambled together. And offhand, I'd say the whole thing was focused on *me!* Say, they ain't going to give me the hot-seat, are they? Is this dame maybe just bait to get me into range?

I'm just suspicious, I guess! Been in that darn war too long. Why would they want to fry me after all this trouble? They got no more expression on their faces than frogs naturally have, but it seems to me they would make good candidates for some benevolent society. Yeah, that's it, they look benevolent. I mean they actually look like they *mean* to do me a favor giving me this little present. But why not furnish it with-

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out the can? Or at least give me a canopener?

Oops, I guess I said the wrong thing—here comes another toothbrush holder, but this one's empty. And it's in two sections. I see now, the joint is under one of the gold bands. The band fits around and seals it shut. Is that thing for me, I hope not!

Jingo, that's exactly what it's for! The two frogs have finally come in and they have me by the flippers. Ye gods and little fishes, but they got muscles!

Well, in I go!

I look across at the dame, and she's grinning all over. For some reason she thinks this is a swell idea, and she's all for it. Maybe she didn't like the wolf look on my puss while I'm looking for a way to open her container . . . Maybe she thinks it's safer this way? Look, baby, I ain't that kind of a jerk; I take my romance seriously. When I hook up with a dame, it's gonna be for life. And it's nothing but a straight compliment when I say you look eligible!

Guess the show's over . . . we're both being taken out of the submarine. Maybe we're being conveyed to some sort of menagerie where we'll be put on exhibition for the frogs to look at and say "that's what kind of freaks inhabit the land above the ocean surface—blew themselves to hell, they did . . ." and laugh like it was a joke.

But, you know, I don't feel like that's what's going to be done. Somehow these frogs still seem benevolent.

Anyway, we are going *up*. Yeah, these frogs are swimming up with us and leaving quite a streak of bubbles behind us. We're going up like a kite.

Now I see what these plastic overcoats do—they have normal pressure in them and we don't get no bends in a suit like this! That means they want us to reach the surface in good shape!

And that's exactly what we do! Our two plastic holders pop up on top of the waves like corks, and the sun is shining bright, and just a little way away is an island that sure is that Paradise I been dreaming about. The frogs are pushing us that way . . .

Now we're on the beach, and the frogs are opening up the containers. I climb out in a hurry, but the girl has beat me to it, and she's standing there grinning at me.

I don't exactly know what's next, but darned if one of the frogs don't give me a friendly clap on the back with one flipper, and then both of them dive back into the briny and in a minute they're gone. All that's in sight is brilliant green water, red coral, blue sky with white, fleecy clouds, white sand beach, waving palms, soft breezes, some low mountains inland, and . . . me and the girl!

"Those," I say aloud, "are the nicest frogs I ever met! They are real gentlemen. And I gotta admit, when they do a thing, they do it up brown!"

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"You like me?" she says, her first words I've heard, in a voice I like fine.

Now, ain't that like a woman! All this terrific stuff around us, and she puts herself at the top of the heap as the most important. Wants to know, do I like her!

I look around. "Now it's this way. All this stuff here I like. It's perfect. And I like you, as part of the stuff. But you just can't say much about liking a girl you haven't even met—liking girls takes a lot of going together and getting to know her. When you finally find out all about her, and you *really* like her, then you got something on which to base an answer to a question that complicated . . . So, if you want an answer, let's begin by asking your name. We oughta be introduced, you know."

"I haven't got a name, yet."

"Haven't got one . . . ?" I musta looked as silly as that sounded.

"No, I'm synthetic. The frogs, who are masters of this planet—have been for millions of years—made me for you. It's up to you to name me."

I got a sappy grin on my puss. "I could call you Eve," I say, "but she wasn't synthetic."

"Wasn't she . . . Adam?" she says demurely.

I don't have no answer to that one!

THE END

NEWS OF THE MONTH

(*Continued from Page* 91)

and Rog, who now lives in New York, is working on a cover story to be used later in the year.

Speaking of Rog, his lovely wife Mari is now writing a column for Bill Hamling's IMAGINATION. Mari's column is called Fadora's Box, and contains news of fandom and fanzine reviews.

Be sure to watch for the June issue of IMAGINATION. The cover story is by Robert Bloch, and the cover is a beautiful painting by Hannes Bok. In addition, beginning with this issue you will find that there are several changes in the cover designed to improve the appearance of the magazine.

The Miami Science-Fiction Association in addition to their project of increasing the number of stf books in the University Library, recently held an exhibition of science-fiction books, magazines and pictures. The exhibition and the recent MUSFA meeting at which Arthur V. St. Germain spoke on the possibility of space travel were both written up in one of the local papers.

So ends the News of the Month for this issue of OTHER WORLDS. If your local fan group is planning any conferences or other activities that you would like to publicize, send the information in to this column and we'll try to publish those items which will be of most interest to our readers.

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THE ROCKET MAN

By Edward W. Ludwig

Bobby's world collapsed when his father declared that there would be no more rocket magazines, rocket models or rocket talk, for Bobby had his heart set on being a Rocket Man!

SWWWWW-ISH!

Up went the great rocket. Up went the *Martian Queen*, two thousand tons of flashing silver and flaming jet. The green April countryside trembled beneath the rumble of its mighty atomic engines, and trees bowed and twisted under the screaming rush of furnace-hot air.

And over all the land, people stared into the warm, blue evening sky, their slitted eyes following the silver, streaking speck.

"There it goes!" they cried reverently. "There goes Bob Chandler!"

In the control room of the ship, the space-hardened captain ran sure, deft fingers over a massive instrument panel. "It's non-stop to Mars!" he yelled recklessly. "I'll be the first man to set foot on the Red Planet —I, Bob Chandler!"

Higher and higher the rocket soared, higher and higher—

Crash, clatter, tinkle!

Abruptly, the flight of the *Martian Queen* ceased.

The great ship had smashed into a window in the rear of the Chandler home. At this moment it lay silent and defeated in Mom's kitchen sink.

"BOBBIE! Come here this instant!"

Mom's voice lashed out sharp and cruel from the back porch.

Bobbie blinked. The words were like blows from a huge fist, tumbling him out of space and time, tumbling him out of the silver rocket and out of the future, and landing him in this gray year of 1970 and in this gray small town in California. And suddenly he was very small again and ten years old and alone.

"Bobbie! I said come here!"

Head bowed, he shuffled toward the porch.

"Those rockets!" exclaimed Mom. "Just look at my kitchen window! What have you got to say for yourself?"

He swallowed hard. He couldn't just say he was sorry. He'd said that before, last week.

Footsteps. Swift, heavy footsteps inside the house. Dad was home from his advertising agency already! His dark, handsome, scowling face ap-

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Illustration by John Grossman

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peared behind the screen door.

"What's the trouble? Rockets?" His voice was even sharper than Mom's.

Mom sighed. "It's the kitchen window—*again*. I don't know what to do with him. Ever since Everson reached the Moon two years ago, he's been at it."

Dad cleared his throat, pushed open the screen door and, with Mom, stepped outside. He withdrew his pipe from his coat pocket and packed its bowl slowly, deliberately, the rhythmic tapping of his finger like a pendulum counting his silent thoughts.

At last he said, "Sit down, son." He looked at Mom strangely, and Mom went back into the house. Then his gaze traveled over the back yard, over the peach and walnut trees, the aero-coupe landing and the hydroponics garden. It was as if he were looking hard for something and couldn't find it.

He sat beside Bobbie on the porch steps. "How do you make all these rockets?" he asked.

Bobbie stammered, "I—I make the bodies at school, out of old aluminum. Mr. Wilson—the shop teacher—said it was all right. And I saved the power out of last year's firecrackers. The rockets are easy to make. They—"

"There'll be no more making of rockets and no more talking about rockets." Dad's voice was suddenly like sharp ice. "You'll get all these ideas out of your head. Understand?"

"N-No, Daddy, I don't understand."

Dad took a deep breath. "It's all right to see a video play or read a story about rockets once in a while. But from morning to night all you think about is rockets! In school you read fantasy magazines instead of studying. You're at the bottom of your class. Someday you'll be taking over the firm, and what kind of a boss will you be with no education? And at home all you do is make these—these *things*. This rocket stuff is just a fad. Sure, Everson reached the Moon, but five expeditions failed before him. A hundred men died for nothing. The Moon's a dead world, and Mars is too far away. They'll *never* reach Mars, at least not in our lifetime."

Bobbie didn't answer. He couldn't. His face was a white, frightened mask, and he kept his lips tight, especially at the corners where they started to sag. He knew that if they sagged he would start to cry.

"And another thing," snapped Dad. "These boys you hang around with, this Lloyd Davis and this Sam, Sam—"

"Sam White?" Bobbie supplied weakly.

"Sam White. They shouldn't be friends of yours. Lloyd is three years older than you, and his father's a drunkard. And this White—well, he's colored. I've nothing against colored people. Most of them are fine people. But, damn it, I want you to go around with white boys of your own age. I want you to have *good* friends."

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"But—"

"Wait'll I finish. When I was your age I got out and played football and baseball, did all the things a normal boy does. All you do is sit and talk about these damned rockets. You've got to get your mind on someone else. Otherwise, you'll make yourself crazy."

"But, Daddy, Lloyd and Sam *are* good friends. And they're the only boys in town who want to be rocketmen. And we're all going to Mars someday!"

Dad rose swiftly. Anger flashed in his wide eyes, and the anger was worse than his words. It was a hot anger, hot as the flames of jets that burnt the land and withered the leaves. Bobbie drew back.

"I'm not fooling this time, son! I've talked to you before and you just ignored me. But this time I'll show you I mean it. You're not going out of this house till you promise to forget about rockets. And God help me, if you say one more word about the Moon or Mars, I'll whip you till you can't stand up!"

DAD meant it this time. Really meant it.

First it was the *Martian Queen.* The little aluminum ship was crushed beneath Dad's foot, and then there was a grating in the kitchen's disposal unit, as of a tin can being crushed.

But Bobbie, listening in his room, knew it was not a tin can. He felt a brief impulse to rush out, to seize whatever remained of the *Martian Queen* and hold it close to him. But somehow he didn't want to see it the way it was now. It would be like seeing Grandpa as he lay in his coffin, sleeping a stiff white sleep that was not really sleep at all.

Soon Dad came into his room, approaching him slowly, touching his shoulder. Bobbie turned away.

"I'm sorry to have to do these things, son, but it's got to be one way or the other. You can't compromise on something like this."

A moment passed, and then Bobbie whirled. His pictures! Dad was going to tear down his pictures!

Dad's hand jerked them down from the wall. First, the photo of Everson on the Moon, then the one of raising the United Nations flag at Lunar City, and the one of Earth taken through Everson's ten-inch telescope on the Moon, and—

Bobbie closed his eyes, and his chest heaved in great silent sobs. There were no tears. *A Rocket Man doesn't cry,* he thought wildly. *You wouldn't see Captain Everson crying.*

So he held the tears in, forcing them into a kind of reservoir deep within him and praying they wouldn't overflow till Dad left.

Now Dad was striding toward the closet. There was the swish of paper, the slap of magazine being stacked on magazine.

Bobbie leaned forward, his eyes blinking open. "No, Daddy, not my magazines, too!"

The magazines, with their stories of the stars and the men who seek

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the stars; the bright covers with the strange ships and incredible people, the brilliant dreams, the familiar names; each a dear friend suddenly gone, gone, forever.

"I'm sorry, son," Dad said, "very sorry."

Alone at last, Bobbie lay in his bed in the naked, empty room, in the darkness. Outside, the stars were shining. At least Dad couldn't tear *them* down, crush them, rip them and dispose of them. He couldn't blot *them* out, no matter how hard he tried.

But the stars weren't so friendly tonight. They were like plain lights in plain houses, far away. There was no strangeness about them and no beauty and no promise. They were ghosts of ancient memories, faded, mocking, unsatisfying.

The reservoir of tears began to overflow. His pillow was wet and hot, and abruptly, the most horrible thought of all spun through his mind:

Are Dad and Mom right? Will I make myself crazy? Are the rockets just a—a fad? Won't Captain Everson ever go to Mars?

He wiped the wetness from his hot face and gasped for breath.

I got to go to sleep, he thought. *If I sleep, I won't think about it.*

But it was a long, long moment before he went to sleep. . . .

THE April morning broke cool and clear. The sun was shining and the land was new and green. But to Bobbie it was a November world, drab and gray and old, and the fine greenery and the sunshine and the bird twitterings were a thin, fragile mask, like the powder and lipstick on an ancient, dying crone.

He dressed, realized he'd slept almost till noon, found a note from Mom on the kitchen table saying she'd gone shopping. Dad, of course, was at his office, so Bobbie was alone. He downed three vita-tabs for breakfast.

He mustn't leave the house, Dad had said. He mustn't talk of rockets or read of rockets or experiment with rockets. What else was there to do? He returned to his room, sat on the bed with head cupped in his hands.

"Hey, Bobbie!"

A voice at the window. He didn't look up.

"Bobbie, what ya doin'?"

It was Lloyd's voice—boyish, shrill around the edges, as light as his tangled mop of blond hair.

He *mustn't* answer. He mustn't even look.

"What's the matter, Bobbie? Something wrong?"

This voice was Sam's—deep, sure, soft, mellow. When Sam talked, it was like hearing the purr of rocket engines from a great distance and its deepness was like the deepness of space. His voice was good, and there was a strength to it—the kind of strength that men would need to reach the stars.

"Well, ain't he stuck-up!" teased Lloyd. "Maybe he'd act human if he knew a real Rocket Man was in town!"

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It was then that a wondrous thing happened. It was as if some omnipotent cosmic switch had been thrown, freezing planets in their orbits, halting time itself. Bobbie's heart stopped beating; his lungs stopped breathing. The universe seemed to pause as the echo of those wonderful, incredible words reverberated through his mind.

He stumbled to the window, daring at last to look at Lloyd and Sam.

"A Rocket Man? *Here?*"

"Sure," said Sam, grinning. "He's on a 48-hour pass, visiting the Dennings on the next block. He's a Moon Patrol man, and boy, you ought to see his uniform. It's black as space—way out beyond the Moon. And his buttons are big and silver, just like Jupiter on a clear night."

"Boy!" Bobbie's eyes brightened. The planets resumed their spinning and time was again flowing. His heart was beating and his lungs were breathing, only everything had accelerated. Life had become a whirling, dizzying adventure.

Then he remembered. He bit his lip.

"I better not go. I—I'm supposed to do some work around the house."

"But a Rocket Man!" cried Lloyd. "Your folks won't care if you get to see a real Rocket Man!"

Swiftly, Bobbie chewed and disposed of a fingernail. "Dad'd kill me if I went. He'd *kill* me, honest and truly, I *know* he would."

"Well," Sam drawled, "then maybe you better not go."

The house was silent. Dad and his sharp voice and angry eyes seemed far, far away. You could almost imagine that Dad didn't exist, that last night had been a terrible nightmare.

Perhaps Dad and Mom would never find out! They were both away from the house. He could see the Rocket Man for just a few minutes, and they would never, never know!

"You ought to *see* him," said Sam. "His eyes are kind of narrow, from looking into space all the time, I guess. And there's a funny look in his face like he's seen things nobody else ever saw. It's kind of a tired look, but it's wise and peaceful, too. You just ought to—"

"I'm coming!" shrilled Bobbie. He leaped at the window and climbed over the sill. "I'm coming with you!" His voice cracked oddly.

"Holy Cosmos," muttered Lloyd. "You don't have to cry about it."

Bobbie wiped his eyes with trembling fingers. "Not crying. Just got sort of a cold, sort of."

They walked down Elm Street. It was a quiet, small town street, splotched with pools of deep shade from the green trees. The houses were tight, white silent faces basking in the warm spring sunshine, and in the air were the simple, familiar sounds—the wind whispering through leaves, the bee-like drone of an aerocar, the distant grumble of a jetmobile; all the lazy, everyday sounds.

It seemed miraculous that a

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Rocket Man should be *here*, on this ordinary street and in this ordinary town. It was like finding an enchanted garden in a desert; it was like bringing a star down out of the sky and throwing it in the middle of your back yard.

But, suddenly, there he was.

He was sitting in an old-fashioned metal lawn chair on the Dennings' lawn, and he was alone and smoking a cigarette.

It was just as Sam had said. The uniform was midnight-black, as smooth as silk and soft as velvet. It might have been cut out of space itself and tailored by the same Power that set the planets in motion. On his shoulders were the insignia of the Moon Patrol: a full moon of silver crossed by a scarlet rocket.

And his eyes were the eyes of a Rocket Man. They were vast pools of wisdom and knowledge and loneliness that peered out from beneath dark brows and crew-cut hair that was sprinkled with gray.

"Howdy," he said deeply.

"Hello," said Bobbie.

"The name's Clark, Lieutenant Clark."

Sam's black eyes shone. "Have you been to the Moon, Lieutenant Clark?"

"Yes, boy, four times and back."

Bobbie gasped. "Then you must have been with Everson—I mean, *Captain* Everson!"

The Rocket Man nodded as Bobbie and Sam and Lloyd squatted at his feet, Indian fashion. "Yep, on his first trip and all his trips. . . I wasn't a Lieutenant at the beginning, just a jet-man, second class. But promotions came fast. We lost four out of ten on our first trip. Some of that moon crust is thin as paper. Step on what you think is rock and down you go, a whole mile, sometimes two miles."

He rubbed his chin reflectively and his eyes twinkled. "Course, reckon we were lucky after all, considerin' we were almost dinner for a space monster."

Bobbie stared. "*Space monster?*"

"Yep, it was on the trip home. We shot around the Other Side of the Moon just to take a look-see. The skipper looked out of the bow porthole and there it was—black as the ace of spades, big as the Roosevelt Building. And its wings—"

"Aw, g'wan," said Lloyd. "There wasn't anything about that in the reports."

"Course not. We figured nobody'd believe it, so we left it out. Well, like I was saying . . ."

Bong!

Inside the house a clock struck softly.

One o'clock.

". . . and these rocks in this Tycho crater were *too* smooth on top and all in a straight line and full of little carvings on the sides. Erosion, said Smith, the geologist, and that's what went in the reports. But, by Jupiter, I'll swear that those rocks were carved by living hands. Yep, one time, a long time ago, there were some kind of people living on the

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Moon. . . ."

Bong, bong!

Two o'clock . . .

"How do you get to be a Rocket Man?" asked Bobbie.

Lieutenant Clark lit a fresh cigarette. "Well, it ain't so easy now. When I started, a crew was pretty hard to find. Five expeditions lost, never heard of again—Everson'd take almost anybody with strong arms and a knack for tinkering with rocket engines.

"But now they're gettin' particular. Talking about setting up a spaceman's school at White Sands. And, by Jupiter, it's going to be tough for young fellows to get in. You got to have it up here." He touched his forehead meaningfully. "And I don't mean just brains, I mean *education*. How you fellows gettin' on at school?"

"Good!" exclaimed Lloyd.

"Pretty good," said Sam.

"N—Not so good," admitted Bobbie.

The Rocket Man studied Bobbie's slight, slender-boned body. "Humm. Course, education is still only half of it. You still need muscles that act quick. When you see a meteor streaking down at you, there ain't much time to think. You just *act*."

Bobbie squinted. A curious realization crept into his consciousness.

"Muscles like—like the muscles you get playing football?"

"Yep, reckon that's right, boy."

Bong, bong, bong!

Three o'clock . . .

"Are you and Captain Everson going to Mars?" asked Lloyd.

The Rocket Man frowned. His face was serious now "Don't reckon we'll ever make it. Nope, too many meteors out there beyond the Moon. They come at you just like rain. Radar warning systems are too slow. It'll take fifteen, maybe twenty years for 'em to rig up a good force-shield."

He grinned. "Mars'll be a job for you fellows. Young men with a lot of brains and education and strength. Yep, me and Everson, we're not so young anymore—not after four trips to the Moon. You see, you get old about three times as fast in space. Still, you do about three times as much living, so I guess it's the same."

"We're going to Mars," Bobbie said suddenly, "—me and Lloyd and Sam. Only—" He scowled. "—only my folks think I talk too much about rockets."

The Rocket Man laughed his deep, gentle, friendly laughter. "Just the way my folks was! A spaceman's kind of a special person, and it's hard for some people to understand 'em. But when they see you're really set on being one, they'll give in. No, sir, you just can't keep a good spaceman on Earth. He may make a lot of detours, but someday he'll be out there, out there with the stars."

Chuckling, he added, "And that *someday* comes sooner than you think, boy. Reckon there's a kind of magic to it. One day you're a boy, and then all at once you're a man

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and you wonder how it all happened so fast. Yep, before you know it—"

Bong, bong, bong, bong, bong!

Five times.

Five o'clock.

The Rocket Man glanced at his wristwatch. "Gettin' supper time. Reckon I've spent enough time talking to you fellows. What's the matter there, boy?"

Bobbie couldn't answer. A great paralyzing coldness had swept into his mind and body. Supper time! Mom was home! Dad was home! They'd want to know where he'd been. He couldn't lie; he'd never told a lie in his life. He'd have to say that he'd been talking to the Rocket Man.

He remembered Dad's flashing eyes and the terrible words, *And God help me, I'll whip you till you can't stand up!*

The Rocket Man rose. "Jupiter, boy! What's wrong? Are you sick?"

Bobbie stared straight ahead, unseeingly. And then, strangely, words echoed through his mind like the caress of soothing, strength-giving hands:

You got to have it up here . . . I don't mean just brains, I mean education . . . And you still need muscles that act quick . . . . It's hard for some people to understand . . . make a lot of detours . . . a kind of magic . . . all at once you're a man . . .

It was simple. He knew how to please Dad and Mom, now. It wasn't going to be hard at all, not really. He stood very stiff, just as Captain Everson had stood in the photo of the Crater of Tycho.

"No, I'm all right," he said. "Goodbye, Lieutenant Clark. See you on Mars."

Dad used the belt from his trousers, just as he'd said he would. But he was wrong about one thing: After it was over, Bobbie could still stand up. It was the sitting down that hurt.

In the kitchen, Dad said to Mom, "Can't understand that boy. I whipped him as hard as any father's got a right to whip a son, maybe harder. And he never even winced, never made a sound. Just stood there smiling. I don't get it. Last night he cried and cried like a baby, and tonight when I left him he was still smiling, like he didn't care at all what I did to him."

"It's strange," reflected Mom. "He said to me, 'You don't have to worry about my schoolwork any more, and I'll be playing plenty of football.' What do you suppose he meant by that?"

Dad withdrew his pipe. "Be damned if I know. Guess we'll just have to wait and see what happens."

April slipped away and, phoenix-like, another took its place, and, after that, still another and another. They put markers of silver rockets over the graves of Captain Everson and Lieutenant Clark where they crashed on a routine exploration of Luna's Mount Pico. Half a billion people died and half a billion people were born, and soon twenty Aprils were gone, like rapidly closing doors in a

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magic corridor of time.

And on a warm spring evening in the year 1990—

Up went the great rocket. Up went the Martian Queen, two thousand tons of flashing silver and flaming jet. The green April countryside trembled beneath the rumble of its mighty atomic engines, and trees bowed and twisted under the screaming rush of furnace-hot air.

And over all the land, people stared into the warm blue evening sky, their slitted eyes following the silver, streaking speck.

"There it goes!" they cried reverently. "There goes Bob Chandler and Lloyd Davis and Sam White—and it's non-stop to Mars!"

Higher and higher the rocket soared, higher and higher . . .

It kept going.

THE END

LETTERS

(*Continued from Page 69*)

ber pseudonym. I never did really believe that you "were born in a log cabin on the frozen steppes of Siberia, July 4, 1876." Are you Frank Patton, too? I also faintly suspect that you're William C. Bailey. By the way, *Courtesy Call* and *A Man Named Mars* were both very, very good. Come to think of it, almost all of OW's stories have been good. Bring back Tanner's "Proffessor Stillwell."

Now, some of the things I would like to see in OW: L. Ron Hubbard, de Camp; Hamilton, Bob Bloch, Charles F. Myers and Bill Hamling. And if it's humanly possible, get John W. Campbell to write you a story. Also, I would like to see a fan column, a back-cover series like you had in AS until '46, more pages and monthly publication. Something else that always peeved me is that sometimes editors completely ignore important questions that fans ask. Write longer letter-answers.

All in all, you've got a fine mag that's still improving with each issue.

Box 397
Genoa, Illinois

Hmm, you've really got a long list of questions here, Jack. First of all, Rap and William C. Bailey are two entirely different people. As for the Patton, Steber, etc. pseudonym, from here on in any stories written by Rap will carry the Ray Palmer by-line, as in The Eye of the Temptress (March), Red Coral (this issue) and Mr. Yellow Jack (next issue). Our thanks for your praise of OW, and as for the authors you want to see—well, we have two stories by Bloch coming up soon and will see what we can do about some of the others you mention.—Ed.

Nelson Bridwell

I wonder if you would help me in a little project? You see, I want to find out what stories of science and fantasy are most popular. So I want all the editors, writers, artists, fen—in fact, everybody who's read enough stf to have favorites—to send me a list of thirteen.

Naturally, I couldn't write to all the mags, so I chose FN and OW, hoping to get as wide a field as possible. Please publish this letter in OW. To give you an example,

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here's my list:

The World's Desire—*Haggard & Lang*
The Ship of Ishtar—*Merritt*
The Time Machine—*Wells*
Dracula—*Stoker*
Frankenstein—*Shelley*
Shadow Out of Time—*Lovecraft*
Brood of the Witch-Queen—*Rohmer*
The Willows—*Blackwood*
Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde—*Stevenson*
August Heat—*Harvey*
A Martian Odyssey—*Weinbaum*
Night Life of the Gods—*Smith*
What Mad Universe—*Brown*

Pass the word on to everyone, and when I'm through, I'll make a report on the most widely named.

120 N.W. 29th
Oklahoma City 3, Okla.

We're more than willing to help you by publishing your list and your request, Nelson, and are sure that you will be hearing from the readers of OTHER WORLDS.—Ed.

Marvin J. Edwards

Congratulations on your recovery. Swell to hear that you can walk again after having been paralyzed.

I have the January issue and have some things to say about your mag—both good and bad. January cover is fine, but when are you going to dispense with or change those inside things on FATE and *Kinsmen of the Dragon?*

Haven't read all the stories, but it looks like an excellent line-up. The November issue was tops thru and thru—after you quickly flipped past the only bad cover OW has had to date. Where did Hannes Bok dream up those lurid colors? *The Merchant of Venus, Bubastis of Egupt and Even Steven* were tops on my list. As for previous issues, my wife liked the Colossus trilogy. Personally, *Dear Devil* still ranks as top single story to appear in OW.

You are to be complimented on being so broadminded in reference to other stf mags. It's swell of you to pass the good word along on their activities. I haven't missed an issue of GALAXY, and must report it's wonderful. The February issue has a remarkable and beautiful cover by Chesley Bonestell, and a marvelous story, *The Fireman*, by Bradbury, which I wish the non-science fiction world could read.

Best wishes for your continued success—hope you have fun fishing.

1052 Merrimac Road
Fairview, Camden, N. J.

Here's a partial answer to your request immediately. If you will look at the inside and back covers of this issue, you will note quite a change. We are now running special features on the inside covers, and the FATE ad to which you referred has been replaced by the Kinsmen of the Dragon ad. We think GALAXY has published some very good stories, as has ASTOUNDING, THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY and SCIENCE-FICTION, and several other magazines, and whenever we run across something we think our readers will like —whether it's in our magazine or someone else's—we want to tell you about it.—Ed.

Bobby Warner

Well, my first letter wasn't printed, so here I am again.

I've just been looking over the January issue of OW. However, I haven't read anything except the Editorial, Personals, Letter column and "Coming in March."

You've got about the best editorial of any stf mag I know of except IMAGINATION, of course. From the looks of your contents page, your stories are unsurpassable, also.

I believe that the reason for your

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magazine's rapid success is that it is so versatile. Not only does it print excellent science-fiction, it also prints fantasy.

So you've got a newcomer by the name of Palmer, eh? Is he any one of your relatives?

I will now cast aside the nonsense and tell you how much it pleases me that you have finally decided to go back to writing science-fiction.

Just in case this letter is published, I would like to invite all of your readers in Texas to drop me a letter. Especially the ones of 16 years of age.

You may hate me for this, dear editor, but I think that you should have at least one reprint story in OW. Why not reprint some of the early AS and FA yarns. We younger members didn't get to enjoy 'em.

Well, goodbye, and may your desk never be void of new stories.

Bessmay, Texas

We have quite a few readers in the Lone Star state, Bobby, and from the way Texans like to stick together, we think you may get quite a response to your request for letters.—Ed.

Walter Norcott

I would like you to place the following list of magazines in the Personals Column of OTHER WORLDS. I have to raise quite a large sum of money for an operation on my invalid brother who has a spinal injury resulting from war wounds during the Dunkirk "withdrawal." A specialist in Birmingham examined him and said that we could expect a complete recovery if my brother was placed under his care, but it would take time and money. Hence, the request for the ad in OW.

The magazines to be listed are those which I believe will raise the most money, i. e., my collection of early *Weird Tales* which dates from the *first issue*, March 1923.

1923—*March.* 1st issue, complete with both covers. $10 *June, July-Aug., Sept., Oct., & Nov.* at $4 each.

1924—*Jan., Feb., Mar., Apr., May-June-July, Dec.*, $4 each. *Nov. no covers*, $2.

1925—*Jan., Feb., Apr., June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec.* $4 each. *Mar. & May*, no covers, $2 each.

1926—*Jan.* thru *Dec. complete*, 12 issues, $3 each.

1927—*Jan.* thru *Dec., complete*, 12 issues, $2.50 each.

1928—*Jan.* thru *Dec. complete* 12 issues, $2.50 each.

1929—*Jan.* thru *Dec.* with the exception of *Sept.*, $2 each. *Sept.*, no covers, $1.

All are in excellent condition except for the four coverless ones. I will pay all postage. Please give this sale a big boost, Mr. Palmer, won't you?

41 St. John's Pl.
Worcester, England

Walter, with a collection like this for sale, we don't think you'll need a "big boost" from us—you'll probably be swamped with offers. But we are printing your request in the letters column, since the Personals Column has already gone to press for this issue.—Ed.

Alice Bullock

I've been a science-fiction-fantasy fan since away back when Argosy All Story Weekly published The Girl in the Golden Atom. I firmly believe in telling another when they're doing a good job, but somehow, with editors there's a bit of procrastination. March OW jolted me out this time. Doggone, Mister, you've outdone yourself. There's not a story that isn't interesting and a couple have that rarity in stf stories, real humor. Your own *Eye of the Temptress* is a good one—although I had the feeling that you

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hurried to meet a deadline or something in the ending; that, or a wide gap of time in the writing of the first and last parts. What's the idea of giving Rog Phillips cover credit? I'll scream if you two get together. It's bad enough that Fredric Brown and Mack Reynolds collaborate. They're each too good to pool their talents. For the same amount of thought and time working alone we could have TWO good stories instead of one. The same applies to you and Phillips.

David Keller's bit of satire *The Plot Machine* is priceless. Come out of the basement though, Mr. Keller and rattle a few of the delectable skeletons in closets in an ancestral mansion or so. Those stains aren't all coffee—the Java man, if not his brew, has been extinct quite some time.

Before I shut up, huzzas loud and long for McCauley's illustrations. His black and whites are even nicer than his color, and that isn't anything to sneeze at.

Test Piece is a nice idea and I like your way of handling it. My TP (telepathy quotient) blew a fuse, I'm going to have to study the story for a clue to those two-three words. It would be fun to hit raspberry time at Amherst. They never run out my ears no matter how many people give 'em to me.

812 Gildersleeve
Santa Fe, N. M.

Judging from the number of letters we've received, it'll be a long time before we live down that "Palmer wrote the story but Phillips got the credit on the cover" mistake. It's just one of those things that happen all too often around an editor's office. But as for your objections to having two good authors collaborate on the grounds that it means one less story—we sorta thought that they could turn out a superior story in less time by combining their abilities. We agree that McCauley's interior illustrations are beautifully done, and are having him do quite a few more for us. How did you like the one for The City in this issue?—Ed.

Albert Lewis

The other day in a fit of insanity augmented by the names of some really excellent authors on your contents page, I broke down and bought the March issue of OW. Then I compounded the crime by reading the magazine clear through. And I received the surprise of my life; the magazine was good. I have sampled it on previous occasions and found it definitely not so.

The best item therein was Willy Lay's article on little people; the best story was *The Solution* by William C. Bailey. While not spectacular, this story had both the characterization and science to give it a feeling of solidity that is lacking in much present day stf. Perhaps because of the theme, but also because of the—consistancy is the best word I can think of—it was reminiscent of E. Mayne Hull's Artur Blord series. Which brings up a point—it could found a very good series in its own right. The second one might tell how the process was put on the market, which would give the author a good chance to expound on future society. The third might tell how the hero was duped—almost—of his fortune. By the fourth story he might have acquired a certain amount of experience and make a coup of his own. The fifth—but that is for Mr. Bailey to decide. But he should remember to keep his hero human, which means fallible, and to let him grow with each story. The endless series a la Captain Future I do not like.

Trailing right behind come three stories; David Keller's excellent light fantasy *The Plot Machine*,

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Lou Tabakow's *Wedding Present* with its super shock ending, and Russell's *Test Piece* which managed to create, maintain and—thanks to the editor—is still maintaining considerable suspense.

The rest of the stories were good but not exceptional, your own *Eye of the Temptress* having been saved from complete nonentity only by the liberal application of sex. *Last Laugh* while passingly well done has been done before, *The Switcheroo* was an old idea, but very well done, and the other two fantasies were—fantasies. I prefer science fiction. Purely a matter of taste.

I greet with joy your announcement about the return of inside cover features and would like to suggest that you stick pretty closely to artist's biographies. They are rather less well known than most authors. You might start out with the really big names of the past—St. John, Morey, Paul, Wesso, Schneeman, etc. and then take on the present day top men — Orban, Cartier, Finlay, Lawrence, et. al. With maybe the cover done by the artist of the month. While on the subject of artists, compliment John Grossman for the illustration on page 24. It's exceptional. No chance of getting hold of the original, I suppose? Also the ones by Terry on pages 32, 81 and 108 were good. The ones on pages 6-7 and 99 were poor, and the rest of the illustrations were adequate. The ones for The Wallpaper by McCauley were also inferior.

But in general the whole issue was enjoyable, and your no-policy editorial policy continues to be the most enjoyable thing in the magazine. One more item: no Shaver, please. I regard Shaver as the one thing lower than Dianetics.

Ricketts House
Calif. Inst. of Tech.
Pasadena 4, Calif.

We're not surprised that you found the March issue good—we think most of our readers will tell you that OW has been improving with each issue, and we intend to keep on improving. Take this issue, for instance, we think you'll find some stories here to your liking, and hope you'll let us know about it. We have another article by Willy Ley on hand now, and more coming up in the future, not to mention a biographical feature about him. Thanks for the list of artists you recommend for cover features, and we want to hear from more of our readers as to their favorites. St. John is the subject for the June issue, and we'll get busy on some of the others right away. We suggest that you look up William C. Bailey's Skeleton Key in the January OW. It has the same good qualities you enjoyed so much in The Solution.—Ed.

Peter Berge

I have just finished reading the March issue of OW and I must say it is a decided improvement. I would say it was the best issue of OW since No. 4 (the one with the gorgeous bem and the Eric Frank Russell *"Dear Devil"*). I have a bone to pick with you however. In the last two issues you've been blasting away at Galaxy. Now I don't see what you should criticize Galaxy for. In my mind it and aSF are by far the best mags on the market. Just to assuage your wounded dignity I will admit that you have one of the better mags on the market. Not the best, but way above average. I see that several people are using your letter columns to make derogatory remarks about aSF, what weird tastes some people have.

To get back to your mag I would like to compliment you (or maybe I should say compliment Bill Terry) on the illo on pages 80-81.

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For some reason, it caught my fancy. The story was quite good too. Only one blot in the issue, and even that was a good story (using the AS system of standards, which is going rather low). I refer to the Ray Palmer thing. Ah well, you may improve and you don't have too far to go. A word about the cover. I liked it even though I am fanatically set against any kind of women on stf covers. I might as well rate the stories.

Last Laugh was definitely not up to Sturgeon's usual level, but very readable. *Wedding Present* was nice and sharp. Crisp. I liked it, but not to a great extent. *The Plot Machine* was a disappointment. *Eye of the Temptress* was not much better than mediocre. The only story not up to snuff as remarked above. *Angus MacAulliffe and the Gowden Tooch* was readable, but did not possess the great touch common to aSF and Galaxy. *Test Piece* was very good. *The Switcheroo* and *The Wallpaper* were readable and *The Solution* was either best or second best in the issue. There were no outstanding stories, but the average was high. By the way, I dislike the space covers you've published so far. My conception of a space ship does not run to orange and red paint, exterior jets, and useless gadgetry. For a good space ship see the Bonestel cover on the Feb. '51 Galaxy. All I've got to say is get Asimov, more Russell and Bradbury and better interior illustrations.

I am not enclosing my address as this letter might get printed and I have no desire to correspond.

California

We think you must have mis-interpreted the editorials in reference to Galaxy as they were not intended as "blasting away" at the magazine. If you'll notice, OW has consistently said that both aSF and Galaxy were good magazines and we have recommended them to our readers. We do, however, believe that editorials were meant to give the editor a chance to talk about what he thinks and what he believes in. Newspaper editorials are not usually devoted to listing and commenting on items that appear elsewhere in the paper, they give the editor's view on different situations and problems. Mr. Gold mentioned that there wasn't much to talk about in an editorial and Editor Palmer merely pointed out that there not only was a lot that could be talked about—there was a lot that should be talked about. Reread the editorial with this in mind, and I think you'll agree.—Ed.

Yvonne K. Worth

Once again I take my pen in hand to hand you orchids. If you've ever had any ideas about retiring, forget it! I don't think the stf world could stand to lose a man like you. I am referring to your editorial in March's issue of OTHER WORLDS. What you said there is an example of how every science-fiction fan and writer feels. I think we all enjoy stf because it gives us a feeling of living in the future. It helps us look past the troubled world of today and helps us see one universe, happy and at peace.

Peace, it's wonderful, but I have one question. What is it? I'm only nineteen, and all I can remember is before the war, and after the war, and before the war, and another war. Has there ever been a time when the world was at peace?

But we look ahead, look ahead through science-fiction, through the writer's eyes to the day when there will be the peace and content in this tired old world that we'd all love.

After all, who besides dreamers

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and science-fiction writers and fans look as far into the future as the 25th and 50th century and beyond? Someone once told me I was crazy for reading stf. What possible good could it have, they asked. What a good question, and how many answers there are. But the best answer of all was your recent editorial—and right now, all the fans who passed it by should get it out and read it. (That's silly—who passes up an editorial by Ray Palmer?)

Well now that I've popped off on that subject, I shall say the stories were up to their usual fine standard, and the contest was put to the fans in a very amusing way. Keep up the good work with OTHER WORLDS. I love the magazine.

P. O. Box 132
Aurora, Ill.

That, Yvonne, was one of the ideas behind the March editorial. That in our science-fiction magazines we not only provide entertainment and good reading (which is the basic requirement for a good magazine) but that by taking the problems of today—of which there are admittedly an abundance—and writing stories about their possible outcomes, we can encourage people to think about these problems and perhaps we may eventually find solutions for them. It's certainly worth trying, anyway.—Ed.

F. Lee Jacquette

It seems to me that the quality of the stories appearing in OTHER WORLDS varies considerably from issue to issue. In general, your March issue was good, but did not come up to the standard set by some of the earlier issues. However, in my estimation OW is close to the top in over-all presentation. Artwork, both cover and interior, is outstanding and I find the letter section interesting and stimulating.

My favorite artist is Malcolm Smith, but I do not share in the enthusiasm for Hannes Bok expressed by many of your readers.

Concerning your editorial in the March OTHER WORLDS, I agree in part with you but I think you were unnecessarily harsh on Mr. Gold. You must consider his viewpoint, i. e., his job is to choose and edit stories for his publication and not to use it as a soapbox for his own hopes and fears, likes and dislikes, opinions and ideas.

Best luck and hoping you will present more stories of the caliber of *A Man Named Mars* and *Courtesy Call* in future issues.

145 Shoreview Rd.
Manhasset, N. Y.

We'll be having some more Smith covers for you soon, and the next two issues of OW will have covers by H. W. McCauley and James Settles, in that order. By the way, surely you'll agree that Bok did a magnificent job on the cover for this issue.—Ed.

Eldon K. Everett

Just finished the January ish of OW. It was good!

First comes the Steber story. Could have been better, as is—good enough.

Next, *Skeleton Key*. P. U. 'Nuff sed.

Third, *Water for Mars*. Good, as all of Mullen's work.

Fourth, *Troubador*. For Reynolds this is bad.

Fifth, Hooray for *Robot Romance*. Love those Robot tales.

Sixth, Temple was not so good this issue.

Seventh, *Glass Woman of Venus* is the best in this ish. It demands a sequel. The McCauley pic was the best one yet.

Question, where was the News of the Month this issue?

Hooray—Palmer's gonna have a story in the next issue. Also Bloch —Hooray.

P. O. Box 513

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Tacoma, Wash.

We'll answer your question first. The News of the Month was crowded out of the January issue, but is back again to stay. The same thing happened to the Bloch story that was to be in the March issue. You'll find it in the June issue instead. "Mac" McCauley is, in our opinion, one of the best when it comes to interior illustrations, which is why we had him illustrate The City, in this issue, and few more stories which hasn't been scheduled as yet. —Ed.

Jan Romanoff

OTHER WORLDS has done more than hold its own during 1950. It's really quite an accomplishment, you know considering this was your first year of publication.

It may interest you to know that I've added Hodge Winsell (a pen-name for lord knows who) to my list of hilarious reading. Personally, I think he's in a class with Myers.

One of the really enjoyable stories of the issue was *Glass Woman of Venus* by Irwin. I will always remember Irwin for his Justice of Martin Brand which was truly great.

Your editorial was interesting. In it though, you appear to take Galaxy with tongue in cheek. I don't know how other fans feel about Galaxy, but I think it's the leader in its field. I place OW third.

Letters—I agree totally and wholly with Paul Ross. For two years Sigler has tried, in vain, to pull fandom to his way of thinking (?).

That's about it. I hope I haven't sounded derogatory. You really are doing an admirable job.

26601 So. Western
Apt. 341
Lomita, Calif.

Yes, 1950 is gone, and we hope OW has shown a years-worth of improvement — we've certainly tried. Hodge Winsell is, to the best of our knowledge, a real person and not a pen-name. We too, enjoyed the stories about Archie and are awaiting anxiously to see what author Winsell is cooking up, next.—Ed.

David Ish

In reading one of your later issues of OTHER WORLDS I saw a letter from a fan asking if you charged for the personals in your Personals Column. Much to my joy I found that this service is free, and it would please me very much if you would run one for me. I recently "discovered" science-fiction last summer while vacationing in Wisconsin. I found the September issue of OTHER WORLDS (about the first science-fiction magazine I have ever bought) to be highly entertaining and adult in comparison with most pulp magazines on the market. This issue interested me so much that I subscribed to OW shortly after reading it. Your magazine has helped me to become a science-fiction fan and I am enjoying every minute of this miserable existence that I have brought upon myself since that day I spied OW in a drugstore in Silver Lake, Wisconsin.

"What's with the Rocket ships" was my first remark when I saw the cover painting for Byrne's *Colossus III*. Those were my last skeptic words ever spoken against science-fiction. Now every night I get down and kneel before a carved image of Ray Bradbury and spend fifteen minutes in silent meditation and praise of OTHER WORLDS. However, I had never before attempted to send a letter to an editor or join a fan club. Finally I summoned the courage to send this letter to you. As I am a relatively new fan I do not know of any fan clubs existing in northern New Jersey. I would like to contact any fans or fan clubs in this vicinity. It

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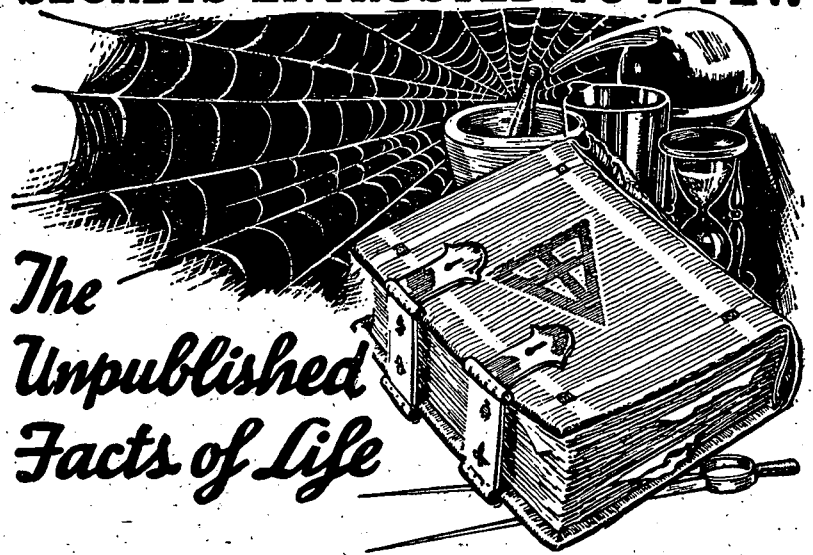

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would please me very much if you could print this, Mr. Palmer, as I am about the loneliest fan in the state of New Jersey.

914 Hammond Rd.
Ridgwood, New Jersey

Alright you New Jersey fans, you have Dave's name and address so why don't you drop him a letter. Do you want people saying New Jersey fans don't stick together?—Ed.

Don Wilson

For some strange reason I feel compelled to write you about the March OTHER WORLDS. This is a periodic compulsion, and everytime the moon changes color I write to the editor of one magazine or another.

Ah well, it was a good issue and it deserves comment. The cover was most abominably purty, even though it features so hatchet-faced a heroine and even though *The Eye of the Temptress* can't make up its mind who wrote it; and I suppose I must grant you the most attractive covers in the business, with the exception of that on the January issue.

To be sure, you don't have the certain difference that Galaxy's covers have. Ah well.

I wish you'd correct the discrepancy between the announced date for each issue's appearance and its actual appearance. I also wish you could achieve monthly publication, but who cares, as long as you're not going to run novels—which is unfortunate.

It appears that we're hopped up on editorials. Let's forget for the time being that Gold has agreed to write editorials on the subject of science-fiction . . . a subject which was decided by reader vote. Let's forget, too, for the time being, that personally I'd a lot rather read an editorial in the old Palmer manner than in the current Campbell manner, which comes closer to the ideal type whereof you speak.

Look, now. Any science-fiction magazine must stand or fall on the merits of the stories in it . . . not on the merits of the editorials. 'Taint the point, I agree. But it has a bearing on the point.

Science-fiction is a dreaming literature, and a literature which has a hand in shaping of tomorrow . . . a much over-rated hand, to be sure . . . this I agree with. I do not agree that that hand is played via the editorials written by Doc Lowndes or Lila Shaffer or Jerome Bixby or Sam Merwin or even John W. Campbell, Jr. That hand is felt through the writings of the men who produce science-fiction, and the editor's part therein is revealed most effectively, not in the degree of tear-jerking produced in his editorials, but in the overall picture (gestalt!) of the stories he picks and encourages his writers to turn out.

I wonder how many of the readers and read the editorial. I wonder in which decimal place it would show up. What's the most effective way an editor can show his faith and hope for a better tomorrow . . . a united galaxy, if you will? By picking stories that demonstrate it, that's how; by encouraging the new talent that he spies in stf and by encouraging the old talent not to become hackneyed.

Currently there are two philosophical traditions evident in stf; the Bradbury which is akin to the Aldous Huxley/S. Fowler Wright, Smash the Machines; and the Campbell/Raymond F. Jones, or Let The Machines Rule.

They're both dangerous. If you want to get hopped up about something, you might think about this, not about the fact H. L. Gold (who edits the best prozine that ever hit the stf field) happens to dislike editorials.

I very much approve of the challenge you present by this type of

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editorial, Mr. Palmer. It's unique in the field and there can't be too much praise showered upon it. Between you and Gold I believe the stodgy tradition of the good stf since 1938 will break down.

May I make a suggestion? Use longer stories. If you can't or won't run serials, at least run a few more of 35,000 or 40,000 words. I've never seen any number of short-shorts that can give meat to a magazine.

Your longest story in your current issue was best, and I hope you intend to work Bailey. He combines cleverness at working the angles with one of the most subtle ways of working in the background that I've ever seen. If he is really William Bailey, he's a find and regardless of what his real name is, we need more of him.

We also need more of this Ray Palmer. Hmm . . . didn't he used to do stories for the Teck Amazings? Nice to see him back under his own monicker. Even if the cover cheated him.

I'm blank on the subject of *Test Piece*. I enjoyed your presentation of the rules as much as the story.

Rest of the stuff was pleasant enough. I think the letter column needs more pep.

Ah well, keep it up and one day you'll be as good as Gold.

Cal Hall, UR
Redlands, Calif.

As soon as we recover from that last pun, Don, we'll get around to talking back to you. Hmmm, where to start, that's the question. Suppose we take your comments on editorials and stories first. Judging from the mail we get, quite a few people do get around to reading the editorial of a magazine. As you can see from the Letters Column this issue, almost everyone read the March editorial. We'll agree that the stories are the main factor in a magazine. But the editor, in his editorial, can let the readers and the authors know that the magazine does not have a staid and stodgy policy, and that he will welcome stories into which the writer has put some thought, even though his (the writer's) line of thought may be somewhat unorthodox. He can encourage new writers as well as prod the established ones by stating editorially that the magazine has a "no-policy policy."—Granted? As for longer stories, the next issue has a 30,000 worder by S. J. Byrne. In coming issues we have a 45,000 word story (tentatively in the Oct. issue) and a 34,000 word one (as yet unscheduled). As for getting the mag on the stands on time, we have completely revised our schedule, and from the June issue on we think you'll find us sticking close to the date given on the contents page. We'll be having more Palmer stories and we'll be sure to give proper credit on the cover.—Ed.

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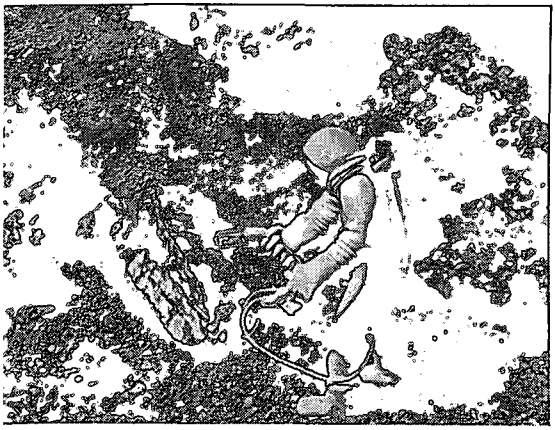

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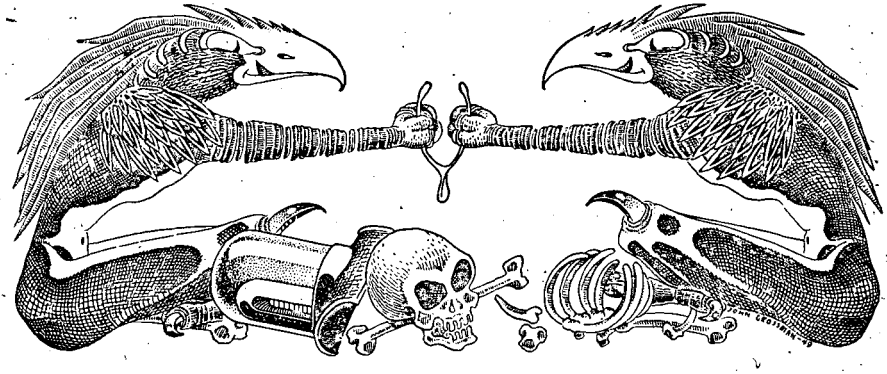

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